

*The scholastic studia humanitatis and the
hagiography of humanism*

If the similarity of Piccolomini's, Biondo's, and Facio's presentations encourages a monolithic view of humanism at mid-century, such an impression is undermined by a series of collective biographies written by the Florentine Giannozzo Manetti (1396–1459) in the same period.¹ Whereas in the previous chapter humanism emerged as a distinct realm of culture identified squarely with the revival of Latin eloquence and to a lesser degree with Roman antiquity and virtue, here it will appear as a general cultural flourishing integrating vernacular poetry and scholasticism with Latin rhetoric and Greek studies. In a neat sleight of hand Manetti nearly dissolves humanism within the larger intellectual and literary culture of the age, one that includes almost all of the disciplines and pursuits explicitly (Facio) or implicitly (Aeneas Sylvius, Biondo) excluded in Chapter 1: natural philosophy, theology, mathematics, and music. Only law, both civil and canon, is banished from the realm of the *studia humanitatis*. Manetti uses this term in many places to describe something basically equivalent with the *artes liberales* (the scholastic preparation of the *trivium* of grammar, rhetoric, and logic, and the *quadrivium* of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music), with natural philosophy and theology, and with what he nebulously calls “the study of things human and divine.” Manetti does not entirely dissolve humanism as a distinct cultural category, though. Despite the conflation of the name *studia humanitatis* with scholasticism, humanism does ultimately emerge an integral, independent concept, although not precisely in the form described by our first three authors. Here it is still primarily a literary pursuit, but one which embraces vernacular as well

¹ On Manetti, see Simona Foà, “Manetti, Giannozzo,” in *DBI*, vol. LXVIII (2007), pp. 613–617; Lauro Martines, *The Social World of the Florentine Humanists, 1390–1460* (Princeton, 1963); Christine Smith and Joseph F. O'Connor, *Building the Kingdom: Giannozzo Manetti on the Material and Spiritual Edifice* (Tempe, 2006), pp. xi–xiv; and Stefano U. Baldassarri (ed.), *Dignitas et excellentia hominis: Atti del convegno internazionale di studi su Giannozzo Manetti. Georgetown University – Kent State University, Fiesole – Firenze, 18–20 giugno 2007* (Florence, 2008).

as Latin eloquence. Furthermore, it begins with the rebirth of vernacular poetry, before continuing with the revival of classical Latin and the reintroduction of Greek into Italy. In another departure, Manetti adds an element of hagiography into his depiction of humanism and its exemplary exponents. He not only defends the new learning as compatible with Christian orthodoxy, but he even portrays it as the path to the good life.

Manetti emerged from a different cultural matrix and had notably different intellectual allegiances from our first three authors. He learned Latin relatively late, when he was already in his twenties (ca. 1420), after training to be a merchant in accordance with his father's wishes. He undertook his studies of Latin and classical literature in the Augustinian monastery of Santo Spirito in Florence, where the new learning had flourished since the Trecento.² It was in Santo Spirito that Giovanni Boccaccio had deposited his own personal library, and also where Salutati had received much of his own advanced training. Eugenio Garin has emphasized that in this context Manetti "absorbed the ideas of early humanism, the teaching of Petrarch, Salutati, and [Luigi] Marsili" – not an intellectual genealogy boasted by our first three authors.³ Thereafter Manetti learned Greek from the Camaldolese monk Ambrogio Traversari in another monastic setting, Santa Maria degli Angeli. As a wealthy *fiorentino* of the highest social standing, Manetti was heavily invested in the city's chief source of cultural capital: the literary production and reputations of the so-called Three Crowns of Florence, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. Against detractors both within and without Florence, he insists doggedly on their humanist status, praising their vernacular works as a matter of course and defending the orthodoxy of their lives and studies. Petrarch is a liminal, if not a marginal figure in Piccolomini and Biondo, and he is ignored by Facio. Dante and Boccaccio suffer the fate of oblivion in our first three authors. The same pattern recurs, as we shall see, in the texts of Paolo Cortesi and Marcantonio Sabellico to be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. But for Manetti, the nature and the value of humanism stand and fall with these three Trecento writers. Manetti's texts are invaluable for giving us insight into the understanding Florentines, or a leading group of Florentines, had of humanism in the middle of the fifteenth century. This insight is of fundamental significance for two reasons. On the one hand Manetti's vision largely corroborates that of Eugenio Garin. In Garin's view, Dante and Petrarch inaugurated a

² On the milieu of Santo Spirito, see Rudolph Arbesmann, *Der Augustinereremitenorden und der Beginn der humanistischen Bewegung* (Würzburg, 1965), pp. 73–119.

³ Garin, *Italian Humanism*, p. 56 [Italian original in *L'umanesimo italiano*, p. 69].

bona fide age of *umanesimo* by turning their backs on medieval authorities and taking their orientation instead from ancient *auctores*, boasting a revolutionary program (substantially animated by Petrarch) of *humanitas* in the grandest anthropological, social, and political senses of the term.⁴ On the other hand, as much as Manetti accords with Garin, he diverges in this respect from all the other authors considered in this study. This incongruity suggests that the interpretation of humanism enunciated by Garin and now taken for granted in Italian scholarship is representative of a specific Florentine situation and perspective but less relevant to a broadly Italian conception of what humanism was and meant.

In this chapter an attempt will be made to distill Manetti's syncretic notion of humanism from three different but related accounts contained in collective biographies dating from 1439 to 1458.⁵ The main focus will be on the *Trium illustrium poetarum florentinorum vita* (*The Lives of the Three Illustrious Florentine Poets*, 1440). This work contains the lives of the Three Crowns Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio (these lives will generally be referred to individually as the *Vita Dantis*, *Vita Petrarchae*, and *Vita Boccacii*) as well as parallel biographies of two ancient philosophers, Socrates and Seneca. These five *vitae* formed a unit and were handed down together in the manuscript tradition.⁶ The parallel lives of Socrates and Seneca were inspired by Plutarch's *Lives*, but Manetti adds his own innovative twist: in addition to comparing an ancient Greek to a Roman famous in the same field – here moral philosophy – he sets up a comparison between the three modern poets as well. There is an explicit *comparatio* at the end of both sections, and the reader is also encouraged to measure the two sections against one another for himself, and thus to weigh the ancients against the moderns.⁷ The biographies contained in this collection are the

⁴ Particularly expressive of this view are Garin, *Rinascite e rivoluzioni*, pp. 49–88, esp. 75–76; Garin, *L'umanesimo italiano*, pp. 25–46, esp. 25–28.

⁵ The relevant sections of these texts are all found in Manetti, *Biographical Writings*. This volume contains the full text of the *Trium illustrium poetarum florentinorum vita* (*Vita*) and of the *Vita Socratis* (*VSoc*) and *Vita Senecae* (*VSen*), plus excerpts from *De illustribus longaevis* (*DIL*) and *Contra Iudaeos et Gentes* (*CJEG*). Baldassarri and Bagemihl's text is the most extensive and philologically rigorous partial edition of *DIL*. The entire Latin text of the sixth book of *CJEG* is available elsewhere: *Il De scriptoribus prophanis di Giannozzo Manetti*, ed. Gianna Gardenal (Verona, 2008). For complete bibliography of previous partial editions, see Manetti, *Biographical Writings*, pp. 319–320. References will be made to the paragraph number of the work in question, not to page numbers, and the lives of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio in the *Vita* will be referred to under the separate titles *Vita Dantis* (*VD*), *Vita Petrarchae* (*VP*), and *Vita Boccacii* (*VB*) (e.g., *VD*, 6 = *Vita Dantis*, par. 6); all translations are those of Baldassarri and Bagemihl, with modifications noted when made.

⁶ For the unity of these apparently separate works, see Stefano U. Baldassarri, "Introduction," in Manetti, *Biographical Writings*, pp. xv–xvi.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

most extensive encountered so far. As opposed to the more or less short sketches presented by Piccolomini, Biondo, and Facio, Manetti paints a full portrait of each figure, describing his youth and education, achievements and writings, and lastly his physiognomy and habits.

Details of these portraits crop up in two other biographical collections by Manetti, and it will be useful to interpret the main text from time to time in light of the variations among them, as well as of the other biographies of humanists they include. The first, *De illustribus longaevis* (*On Famous Men of Great Age*, 1439), contains the nucleus of the later *Vita Petrarcae* and includes two other biographies relevant to this study, namely those of Coluccio Salutati and Niccolò Niccoli. The second, *Contra Iudaeos et Gentes* (*Against the Jews and the Gentiles*, 1452–1458), is a massive work meant to show the superiority of Christianity and the proper place of ancient, non-Christian learning in the modern, Christian world. Its sixth book contains a collective biography of the learned men of Manetti's age, who are set up as an example of the proper synthesis of ancient and modern, pagan and Christian.⁸ Unfortunately, the state of the text of these latter two sources is too uncertain for them to be used for any but the most tentative and conservative analysis and comparison.⁹ Nevertheless, their bearing on the main text under consideration in this chapter (the *Trium illustrium poetarum florentinorum vita*) suggests that they should

⁸ Descriptions of *CJEG* are available in Alfonso De Petris, "L'*Adversus Iudaeos et Gentes* di Giannozzo Manetti," *Rinascimento*, ser. 2, 16 (1976), pp. 193–205, esp. p. 205: "In un eclettismo filosofico-religioso a base di fede, del pensiero antico vengono recuperati quegli elementi che, alla pienezza dei tempi, confluiscono nella nuova religione"; and Gianfranco Fioravanti, "L'apologetica anti-giudaica di Giannozzo Manetti," *Rinascimento*, ser. 2, 23 (1983), pp. 3–32.

⁹ Both are huge works only portions of which have been published (see note 5 above). I have not seen the extant manuscripts, and it is therefore impossible to contextualize adequately the sections available in print. Brief descriptions of the works are given in Baldassarri, "Introduction"; and as in note 8 above. A general overview of the manuscript tradition of *CJEG* is available in De Petris, "L'*Adversus Iudaeos*"; and Manetti, *Il De scriptoribus prophanis*, pp. 9–41. Exacerbating these difficulties is the fact that printed excerpts of these works indicate lacunae whose contents are nowhere described by the editor, nor are the criteria used in selecting and editing the passages announced. Finally, none of the three works examined in this chapter has received sufficient scholarly attention, and so there is no solid foundation upon which to build. In addition to the bibliography in notes 5 and 8 above, see the partial discussion and observations in: Stefano U. Baldassarri, "Clichés and Myth-Making in Giannozzo Manetti's Biographies," *Italian History and Culture*, 8 (2002), pp. 15–33 [on the *Vita* and *DIL*]; Christoph Dröge, *Giannozzo Manetti als Denker und Hebraist* (Frankfurt am Main, 1987), pp. 65–85 [on *CJEG*]; Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1970), vol. II, pp. 726–734 [on *CJEG*]; Nicola Badaloni, "Filosofia della mente e filosofia delle arti in Giannozzo Manetti," *Critica storica*, 2:4 (1963), pp. 395–450, at 429–435 [on *CJEG*, *DIL*, *VSoc*, *VSen*]; Giannozzo Manetti, *Vita Socratis et Senecae*, ed. Alfonso De Petris (Florence, 1979), pp. 3–105, 207–216 [on *DIL*, *VSoc*, *VSen*]. Also useful is James Hankins, "Manetti's Socrates and the Socrateses of Antiquity," in Baldassarri (ed.), *Dignitas et excellentia hominis*, pp. 203–219 [on *VSoc*].

be consulted when it seems most appropriate and least tendentious, and always under the guidance of restraint.

With these caveats in mind, we can now move on to the interpretation of Manetti's writings and the reconstruction of the view of humanism they evoke. What follows has three parts. The first examines the elastic way in which Manetti uses the term *studia humanitatis*. The second shifts the focus to his history of humanism and depiction of its chief figures. In the third, finally, Manetti's hagiography of humanism, which is the most intriguing and unique aspect of his account, will occupy the foreground.

Things human and divine

The *Trium illustrium poetarum florentinorum vita* (hereafter referred to simply as *Vita*) is an overtly apologetic text whose central purpose is to defend the Three Crowns before the tribunal of Latin humanism. Manetti explains in his preface:

Above all, I was moved by the desire to have their great merits, hitherto hidden among the common people, spread to the erudite and the learned, who until now have despised and dismissed all works of vernacular literature, of which our poets are duly regarded as the chief ornaments.¹⁰

The erudite and learned despisers of vernacular literature are first and foremost the group of humanists that flourished around Leonardo Bruni and Niccolò Niccoli in the first decades of the fifteenth century.¹¹ Their extreme position on the superiority of proper Ciceronian Latin, as well as their dismissal of the Three Crowns, were classically enunciated by Bruni in his *Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Histrum*, composed in the opening years of the fifteenth century.¹² Bruni would ultimately soften his stance, first as part of his public break with Niccoli (*In nebulonem maledicum*, early 1420s), and then more fully in his *Vite di Dante e del Petrarca* (1436). This latter work, significantly written in the “despised” vernacular, celebrates varying civic contributions of Dante and Petrarch and recognizes the latter's role

¹⁰ Manetti, *VD*, 6: “. . . idque praecipue ea causa adductus feci, ut maximas eorum laudes, quae in plebecula hactenus latere videbantur, ad eruditos et doctos viros tandem aliquando conferrem, qui vulgaria cunctorum hominum scripta, qualia pleraque nostrorum poetarum praecipua et habentur et sunt, semper contemnere atque floccipendere consueverunt.”

¹¹ On which see George Holmes, *The Florentine Enlightenment, 1400–1450* (London, 1969), ch. 1: “The Humanist Avant-Garde.”

¹² The dating of the *Dialogi* has long been a subject of contention. See Stefano U. Baldassarri, “Introduzione,” in Bruni, *Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Histrum*, pp. 3–232, at 61–64. For the interpretation of the *Dialogi*, see David Quint, “Humanism and Modernity: A Reconsideration of Bruni's *Dialogues*,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, 38 (1985), pp. 423–445.

in humanism in a way similar to that found in Piccolomini and Biondo.¹³ There is no indication, however, that Niccoli ever changed his rigid classicist views. Niccoli's stance, furthermore, was shared by a broad segment of the humanist movement, if, that is, the three authors examined in Chapter 1 can be taken as representative. For none of them so much as mentions Dante or Boccaccio, and Petrarch, when included in accounts of humanism, is dispatched as an inspirational but nonetheless ineloquent figure. It is to this view that Manetti intends to craft a reply, but he also has in mind the civic lens of Bruni's recent biographies and a larger tradition dating back to Boccaccio's *Trattatello in laude di Dante* (1357), which (as far as he is concerned) have not treated the illustrious poets either adequately or correctly.¹⁴ At stake are thus two connected issues: the Three Crowns' status as humanists, and the kind of life – active or contemplative – proper to humanism.

Manetti's first order of business is to bolster the humanist credentials of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, whose fame rested primarily on their vernacular writings and whose un-Ciceronian Latin now undermined their status in humanist circles. This he does first by playing a kind of name game. To whatever learned interest, pursuit, or accomplishment he mentions – be it scholastic university education, the writing of vernacular poetry, or the reading of Latin authors – Manetti simply applies the label *studia humanitatis*. He thereby conflates activities and qualities singled out by our first three authors as essential to humanism, e.g., eloquence and Latin style, with others they would have excluded, e.g., theological disputations and excellence in vernacular composition. In addition to dissolving these linguistic and disciplinary boundaries, Manetti pushes humanism's temporal borders back to the thirteenth century, when Dante received his education. Such a view would be simply incomprehensible to Aeneas Sylvius and Biondo, who began their accounts of humanism with Petrarch, and especially for Facio, who began his with Chrysoloras. The overall effect is thus both to include all of the Three Crowns in humanist culture and to vastly expand the sense of what humanism is.

Let us begin with the description of Dante's university education in the *Vita Dantis*:

He went to Paris for the sole purpose of studying, for at the time that city was generally regarded as the best place in the world to study all things human and divine. Putting everything else aside, he studied with incredible

¹³ See Hankins, "Humanism in the Vernacular"; and Garin, *Rinascite e rivoluzioni*, pp. 72–73.

¹⁴ Manetti, *VD*, 5.

zeal and dedication both natural and divine sciences, learning so much that in many of those debates which are commonly held there on these subjects he managed to surpass, as everybody agreed, some great philosophers and even some of those who are called “theologians.”¹⁵

In the context of Paris and the scholastic-style disputations in which Dante is said to have excelled, the study of “things human and divine,” or “the natural and divine sciences,” must be Aristotelian natural philosophy and theology, although it is quite likely that Manetti, following Cicero, also intends *res humanae et divinae* more generally as a formula for universal knowledge. At any rate, there is no doubt that Dante, “putting everything else aside,” pursued in Paris the scholastic education *par excellence*. Nevertheless, one line later he is described as having been “safely and quietly immersed in the *studia humanitatis*.” Lest there be any question of Manetti’s having moved on to rhetoric without telling the reader, these studies are immediately referred to as “calm and *divine*.”¹⁶

The conflation of humanist and non-humanist names and pursuits continues throughout the biography. At one point Manetti seems to portray Dante in a way that would resonate with Facio, Biondo, and Piccolomini: he endows him with “unparalleled eloquence,” remarking, “they say he gave extremely elegant orations, which is attested by his many missions to various illustrious princes and supreme pontiffs.”¹⁷ On the other hand, Manetti lists Dante’s major works as vernacular poetry (*La divina commedia*) and a scholastic treatise in Latin (*De monarchia*), genres unlikely to pique the enthusiasm of someone like Facio.¹⁸ Moreover, Manetti refers to Dante twice as a “philosopher,” and in his *Divine Comedy* “Dante not only touched on subjects proper to poetry and poets, but also on moral, natural, and divine things.”¹⁹ That is, he combined what would become humanistic

¹⁵ Manetti, *VD*, 32: “. . . in Parisiensium urbem – studiorum dumtaxat gratia – se contulit, quippe in hoc loco humanarum et divinarum rerum studia ceteris orbis terrarum locis celebratiora, consensu omnium, ferebantur. Ibiq[ue] ceteris omnibus posthabitis, naturalium ac divinarum rerum studiis assiduam et paene incredibilem operam navavit, in quibus usque adeo profecit ut in frequentissimis memoratarum rerum disceptationibus, pro more civitatis, et magnos quidem philosophos et quos etiam ‘theologos’ vocant, una voce omnium, saepenumero superaret.”

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 33: “Dum itaque in huiusmodi humanitatis studiis quietissime simul atque securissime viveret. . .”; “pertranquilla ac divina studia” (translation modified; emphasis mine).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 45: “summam eius elegantiam”; “Elegantissimum in orando fuisse perhibent, quod frequentes eius legationes ad multos cum illustres principes tum ad summos pontifices manifeste declarant” (translation modified).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 51–54.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 43 (“viro philosopho”) and 46 (“tanto ac tam gravi philosopho”); 52: “In hoc divino, ut dixi, poemate non modo poetica ipsa et quae proprie ad poetas pertinent, sed moralia quoque naturalia ac divina.”

subjects – poetics and moral philosophy – with the standard scholastic disciplines of natural philosophy and theology. And when recounting Dante's achievements and summing up his knowledge, Manetti writes:

he rapidly succeeded in attaining a vast knowledge of things human and divine, thanks to the almost divine excellence of his intellect. And so in mathematics – the science that studies numbers, dimensions and harmonics, together with the movements and the revolutions of the stars – as well as in both kinds of philosophy, moral and natural, and finally in the Sacred Scriptures, which embrace all divinity.²⁰

These studies (except moral philosophy) fall under the rubrics of scholasticism and the *artes liberales*, yet elsewhere we read, “Up to the end of his life, he diligently pursued the *studia humanitatis* – of which he had always been fond . . . in a truly remarkable way.”²¹

A similar syncretism of scholasticism and humanism occurs in the *Vita Petrarcae*, where the travails of the poet's early education are recounted:

After studying Latin for four years and finishing his primary education, he . . . was sent to Montpellier . . . to study civil law. This he disliked, for he already delighted to an amazing extent in the delicious books of Cicero and Virgil. After spending another four years there in the study of civil law, he complied with his father's wishes and went to Bologna, where he *wasted* a further four years learning civil law. He thus spent about seven years in the study of civil law *to no purpose*, as he attests in a letter where he *complains bitterly* about *having thrown away so much time*. Nevertheless, . . . he managed to read several works of Cicero and Virgil in secret . . .

Upon his father's death, having finally become independent, he rid himself of all civil law texts and their *foolish commentaries*. He was then in the early years of his maturity and decided to dedicate himself completely to the *studia humanitatis*.²²

²⁰ Manetti, *VB*, 15: “ob quamdam tamen divinam ingenii sui excellentiam magnam humanarum et divinarum rerum cognitionem brevi tempore comparavit. Quippe et in mathematicis – quae scientia tum numeros tum dimensiones, tum consonantias, tum astrorum motus et conversiones una complectitur – et in utraque philosophia, quae ad mores et ad naturalia pertinet, et in Sacris denique Scripturis, quae omnem divinitatem penitus comprehendunt . . .”

²¹ Manetti, *VD*, 38: “humanitatis studia – retenta semper animo . . . magna diligentia mirum in modum usque ad extremum vitae prosecutus est.”

²² Manetti, *VP*, 3–4: “Inde quadriennio grammaticis eruditus, postea quam prima illa puerilia studia transegit e vestigio ad Montem Pesulanum . . . ut ius civile cognosceret (non sine molestia, quod suavis Ciceronis et Maronis libris iam mirum in modum oblectaretur) vicina iam pubertate traducitur. Ubi quadriennio etiam in cognoscendo iure civili consumpto, non iniussu patris Bononiam proficiscitur, quo in loco alterum itidem quadriennium in cognitione iuris prope contrivit. Septem namque annos in studiis civilibus incassum amisit, ut ipse in epistula quadam aperte demonstrat, in qua de hac tanta temporis iactura vehementius conqueritur, quamvis nonnullos Ciceronis et Virgilii libros clanculum . . . legisset.

Yet, once free of “wasting” his time on civil law and its “foolish commentaries,” no longer forced to indulge in Cicero and Virgil in secret, and finally having the opportunity “to dedicate himself completely to the *studia humanitatis*,” what did Petrarch do? He studied for the next twelve years in Toulouse, Paris, and Naples, where he “made great progress in the study of things human and divine.”²³ As in the case of Dante, here, too, humanism can be pursued in Paris and other university centers, and it consists in “the study of all things human and divine,” the standard scholastic disciplines of natural philosophy and theology.

Again as with Dante, Manetti ascribes to Petrarch something which in Chapter 1 appeared as a humanist accomplishment. This time it is the revival of good Latin: “among the many remarkable fruits of his studies, the principal one was his revival of Latin elegance, which he brought back to light out of darkness after it had been nearly defunct for over a thousand years.”²⁴ Manetti is not really in accord with our first three authors, though. Piccolomini explicitly attributed the revival of Ciceronian Latin to Manuel Chrysoloras’ reintroduction of Greek to Italy, and for Biondo it required a combination of Petrarch’s inspiration, Giovanni Malpaghini’s teaching, the reintroduction of Greek, the hunt for lost works of literature, and the flourishing of humanist schools. Manetti, on the other hand, calls it “a remarkable fruit of [Petrarch’s] studies” and a result of “his uncommon and almost divine genius.”²⁵ The revival of classical Latin is therefore the offspring of a standard scholastic education and a superhuman intellect.

Blurring the contours of humanism even more, Manetti attributes Petrarch’s “pursuit of the *studia humanitatis* in many different and distant lands” to “his worthy imitation of Pythagoras and Plato, those two supreme philosophers.”²⁶ Like Dante (again), Petrarch is portrayed as a philosopher; or if not explicitly so, he is at least put into the proper company by way of his “imitation.” Nor did Petrarch neglect sacred literature: “as soon as he had run through all the secular writings of non-Christian

Post obitum vero patris, utpote tunc primum sui iuris effectus, cunctis iuris civilis codicibus eiusque ineptis commentationibus abdicatis, circa primos adolescentiae suae annos humanitatis studiis omnino se dedicavit . . .” (translation modified; emphasis mine).

²³ Ibid., 4. For the quotation, see note 24 below.

²⁴ Ibid., 6: “In his igitur humanarum et divinarum rerum studiis . . . versatus, usque adeo profecit ut inter ceteros praecipuos laborum suorum fructus primus dicendi elegantiam, iam supra mille annos paene defunctam . . . praecipua quadam ac prope divina ingenii excellentia e tenebris in lucem revocavit” (translation modified).

²⁵ See note 24 above.

²⁶ Ibid., 13: “Cum haec igitur humanitatis studia per longinqua ac diversa terrarum loca (Pythagoram et Platonem, duos summos philosophos, egregie imitatus) diutius perscrutaretur . . .” (translation modified).

authors, he at length devoted his efforts to sacred letters, taking incredible pleasure in reading those venerable pages.”²⁷ What we have here is a full portrait of Petrarch as *the* exponent of the proper synthesis of Christian and pagan, scholastic and humanistic, ancient and modern studies, all under the general name *studia humanitatis*. The only subject explicitly excluded from this rubric is law, whose study is “to no purpose” and “foolish.”

The biography of Boccaccio has the same general outline. First he was forced by his father into an apprenticeship in shopkeeping and commerce, which is described as “an irreparable waste of time.” Then he “wasted . . . almost as many years” on the study of canon law and its “mindless commentaries.” Yet “his nature . . . seemed to be particularly suited to literary studies.” Indeed, “he was so born for poetry that he seemed to have been created by God for it alone.”²⁸ Although he was totally devoted to poetry, he studied mathematics and “read the Bible with great interest and pleasure.” In short, he was “a man intensely involved in the study of things human and divine.”²⁹

Poetry, mathematics, the Bible, the revival of Latin, scholasticism, music, natural philosophy, theological disputations, things Christian and pagan, human and divine – Manetti is intent on reducing humanism to a name for general culture and learning. This impression is confirmed by passages from the collective biography found in Book VI of *Contra Iudaeos et Gentes*. In a section devoted to writers from the Duecento, Manetti calls the age “illiterate and uncouth,” undoubtedly in reference to the fact that it precedes Petrarch’s “divine” revival of good Latin. Nevertheless, we then read that the *stilnovo* poet Guido Cavalcanti managed to write verse “with great elegance” that merited commentary by Dino del Garbo, “an excellent philosopher,” and even by Giles of Rome, “regarded as the prince of all theologians.”³⁰ Brunetto Latini, the author of the *Trésor*

²⁷ Ibid., 20: “simul ac cuncta profana gentilium volumina legendo percurrit, postremo sacris codicibus operam dedit, quorum veneranda lectione incredibiliter delectabatur.”

²⁸ Manetti, *VB*, 2–3: “se nihil aliud egisse quam irrecuperabile tempus incassum contrivisse confirmat”; “totidem . . . magna cum molestia frustra consumpsit”; “ineptissimas commentationes”; “suapte natura . . . litterarum studiis aptior videbatur”; “ad ipsa poetica ita natus erat, ut paene ab ipso Deo factus ad haec sola fuisse videbatur.”

²⁹ Ibid., 5: “Sacros quoque Sanctorum Scripturarum libros libentius avidiusque perlegit”; “homini circa cognitionem humanarum et divinarum rerum propterea occupatissimo.”

³⁰ Manetti, *CJEG*, 1: “aetas illa indocta et rudis”; “elegantissime”; “optimus . . . philosophus”; “theologorum princeps et caput.” For Guido Cavalcanti, see Mario Marti, “Cavalcanti, Guido,” in *DBI*, vol. XXII (1979), pp. 628–636. For Dino del Garbo, who wrote a Latin commentary on Cavalcanti’s famous poem *Donna me prega*, see Augusto De Ferrari, “Del Garbo, Dino (Aldobrandino, Dinus de Florentia),” in *DBI*, vol. XXXVI (1988), pp. 578–581. For Giles of Rome, see Francesco Del Punta, S. Donati, and C. Luna, “Egidio Romano,” in *DBI*, vol. XLII (1993), pp. 319–341.

immortalized among the sodomites in the *Divine Comedy*, is also said to have had “great skill in speaking.”³¹ So elegance did crop up amid illiteracy, but its home was among *philosophi*, *theologi*, and vernacular poets rather than Latin *oratores*. A later section devoted distinctly to Quattrocento humanists contains biographies of the Milanese chancellor and papal secretary Antonio Loschi, the Florentine gentleman Roberto de’ Rossi, the Venetian diplomat Francesco Barbaro, and others in a style that generally resembles the short sketches of Facio’s collection.³² These *vitae* highlight eloquence, knowledge of Latin and Greek (the Venetian patrician Marco Lippomano is said to know Hebrew as well³³), translations, and original compositions, especially letters and orations. Interestingly, most are Florentine/Tuscan or Venetian.³⁴ Interspersed in the ranks, however, are individuals who do not quite fit the mold crafted by our first three authors (and who were at any rate not mentioned by them), such as the vernacular chronicler Matteo Villani and Domenico di Bandino of Arezzo, a friend of Salutati and the author of a universal encyclopedia (in Latin).³⁵ Unlike Piccolomini, Biondo, or Facio, Manetti is not concerned to carve out boundaries between classicizing, Latinate humanists and other literary men of the period. Emblematic of Manetti’s catholic conception is Roberto de’ Rossi, who was an intimate of Bruni and Niccoli and who here receives rather more praise than most others. He is “regarded as a great humanist (*orator*) and a leading philosopher of the time.” His knowledge is said to encompass Greek and Latin literature, poetry, oratory, history, mathematics, natural and moral philosophy, and metaphysics. “All the books of Aristotle that he translated from Greek into Latin” are still available.³⁶ Of

³¹ Manetti, *CJEG*, 2: “arte dicendi valuisse traditur.” It is not clear if Manetti intends the vernacular or Latin here. For Brunetto Latini, see Giorgio Inglese, “Latini, Brunetto,” in *DBI*, vol. LXIV (2005), pp. 4–12.

³² For Rossi, see Aldo Manetti, “Roberto de’ Rossi,” *Rinascimento*, 2 (1951), pp. 33–55; and Martines, *The Social World of the Florentine Humanists*, esp. pp. 108–110, 154–165; for Barbaro, see Margaret King, *Venetian Humanism in an Age of Patrician Dominance* (Princeton, 1986), pp. 323–325.

³³ Manetti, *CJEG*, 29. For Lippomano, see King, *Venetian Humanism*, pp. 389–390.

³⁴ Also noted in Fioravanti, “L’apologetica anti-giudaica,” p. 13.

³⁵ For Villani, see Franca Ragone, *Giovanni Villani e i suoi continuatori. La scrittura delle cronache a Firenze nel Trecento* (Rome, 1998), esp. pp. 214–233. For Domenico di Bandino, see Teresa Hankey, “Bandini, Domenico (Domenico di Bandino),” in *DBI*, vol. V (1963), pp. 707–709; for his massive but little-studied encyclopedia, see Markus Schürer, “Enzyklopädik als Naturkunde und Kunde vom Menschen. Einige Thesen zum *Fons memorabilium universi* des Domenico Bandini,” *Mittelalterliches Jahrbuch*, 45:1 (2010), pp. 115–131 and his forthcoming monograph *Biographik als enzyklopädisches Projekt. Studien zu Domenico Bandini und seinem Fons memorabilium universi*.

³⁶ Manetti, *CJEG*, 26: “magnus orator ingensque illius temporis philosophus haberetur . . . Inter cetera rerum suarum monumenta omnes Aristotelis libri ab eo e greco in latinum traducti comperiuntur” (translation modified). Rossi is a character in Bruni’s *Dialogi*, the second part of which is set at his estate.

course, translations of Aristotle are in no way a disqualification of humanist status; Bruni, too, had rendered Aristotle in Latin, and he had even used his versions of the *Ethics* and *Politics*, upon whose literary merits he insisted, as a showcase for the humanist *ad sensum* style of translation.³⁷ Yet Rossi is best known for his translation of the *Posterior Analytics*, one of Aristotle's logical treatises – not exactly a platform for Latin eloquence. Faced with Rossi and his interests in logic, metaphysics, mathematics, and natural philosophy, Facio would have been at pains to decide whether to classify him among the *oratores* or the *philosophi medici*. Manetti, however, feels no such compunction. On the contrary, Rossi is an ideal complement to his portrayal of the Three Crowns and to his view of humanism as seamlessly interwoven with the many other strands of Italian intellectual and literary culture (excluding only the study of law).

Whether Manetti succeeded in his defense of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio is not a question we are in a position to answer, but it is worthwhile to consider why he sought to defend them the way he does. What kind of power might Manetti's argument have had over humanists who were generally hostile to vernacular literature (and likely scholastic learning as well)? Would such men have been convinced by his application of the term *studia humanitatis* to pursuits they would not recognize as pertaining to themselves as *poetae* and *oratores*? Would it have been coherent to them at all? Indeed, the *Trium illustrium poetarum florentinorum vita* is so eclectic that it has been criticized by its most recent editor, Stefano U. Baldassarri, for its apparently “undiscriminating use of . . . sources and . . . tendency to accumulate information regardless of its reliability or provenance.” Baldassarri attributes to Manetti a “mosaic technique” of composition behind which there is neither rhyme nor reason, according to which the author “copied down all the information he found on a certain topic” and “then rearranged the sources thus collected, often without making significant changes in the language and the syntax of the original.” With regard to the *Vita Dantis* Baldassarri concludes, “such a portrait could only be extremely eclectic, not to say inconsistent.”³⁸ James Hankins, however, while identifying the same cut-and-paste method in a study of the related *Vita Socratis*, sees therein rather more method than madness. According to Hankins, “the seemingly random collection of material is in fact carefully curated to achieve a

³⁷ See Paolo Viti, “Introduzione,” in Leonardo Bruni, *Sulla perfetta traduzione*, ed. Paolo Viti (Naples, 2004), esp. pp. 22–51.

³⁸ Baldassarri, “Introduction,” p. xiii; and at greater length in “Clichés and Myth-Making,” where he describes Manetti's “method, or lack thereof” (p. 25; “mosaic technique” on p. 28).

particular purpose; it achieves its effect" – in that case to present Socrates as a classical model for the humanist movement – "pointillistically by the arrangement and juxtaposition of facts, quotations and anecdotes."³⁹ In my view, Manetti used the same procedure in his treatment of the Three Crowns. For although the *Vita* may at first glance seem to be an incoherent jumble of memorabilia, the *Gesamtbild* it portrays corresponds quite well to the reality of Manetti's own life, education, and activity as a humanist.

We recall that Manetti was a latecomer to humanism and a product of the monastic milieu of Santo Spirito and Santa Maria degli Angeli. He also learned Hebrew for purposes of Biblical scholarship. As for his "literary and intellectual personality," Christine Smith and Joseph F. O'Connor have argued that Manetti had a "pronounced attachment to Scholastic and Aristotelian dialectic, Augustine's understanding of the human condition, and Paul's spirituality."⁴⁰ These conclusions are perfectly in line with Manetti's education and with his presentation of humanism in the *Vita* and the *Contra Judaeos et Gentes*; Smith and O'Connor omit only the centrality of classicizing Latin to his cultural orientation. It is also worth noting that Manetti's own personal experience of apprenticeship to worldly business at the behest of his father, and thus of the deferral of his humanistic studies, mirrors the early lives of both Petrarch and Boccaccio as recounted in the *Vita*, both of whom were forced to train for legal and mercantile careers before they were able to embrace the *studia humanitatis*. Manetti, then, portrays his own brand of humanism in the *Vita*, and, considering his reputation, one likely shared by others as well. Manetti was extolled as an exemplary humanist by none other than Vespasiano da Bisticci.⁴¹ Furthermore, he was chosen to give the *laudatio* at Leonardo Bruni's funeral (1444), at the end of which he personally crowned the deceased chancellor of Florence with laurel.⁴² Manetti's conception of humanism doubtless resonated with other humanists, at least within the walls of Florence.

To deepen our understanding of this conception, let us consider a curious digression found towards the end of the *Vita Senecae*, one of the companion

³⁹ Hankins, "Manetti's Socrates," p. 204. ⁴⁰ Smith and O'Connor, *Building the Kingdom*, p. xi.

⁴¹ Vespasiano included a relatively long biography of Manetti in his *Vite* and also wrote a separate biography that is quite extensive, the *Comentario della Vita di Giannozzo Manetti*; both are in Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Le Vite*, ed. Greco. On the relationship between Vespasiano and Manetti, see Heinz Willi Wittschier, "Vespasiano da Bisticci und Giannozzo Manetti," *Romanische Forschungen*, 79:3 (1967), pp. 271–287. On the Florentine bookseller Vespasiano, see Giuseppe M. Cagni, *Vespasiano da Bisticci e il suo epistolario* (Rome, 1969).

⁴² Cf. Giannozzo Manetti, *Oratio funebris in solenni Leonardi historici, oratoris ac poetae laureatione*, in Bruni, *Epistolarum libri VIII*, ed. Hankins.

pieces to the *Vita* of the Three Crowns. In this passage Manetti discusses the controversy then raging over the Roman philosopher's oeuvre, namely, which works should be attributed to him and whether there were in fact two Senecas. After rehearsing the various positions on the matter, Manetti exclaims in frustration:

We believe it is much better in the end to leave it to the grammarians to investigate such frivolous and idle things rather than waste time, the most precious possession of all, by investigating minute and trivial matters in vain. So we leave it to *the grammarians and mere professors of literature* to resolve the issue in some fashion or other, adding this task to *their foolish little controversies*. Let the men who think these childish and frivolous investigations, which it is shameful even for boys to study, should be pursued into old age, weigh these matters with diligence and accuracy from every angle.⁴³

These grammarians and “mere professors of literature” have to be humanists and could very well be identified with the teachers so highly praised by Biondo Flavio. Biondo's beloved Giovanni da Ravenna was, after all, a *grammaticus*, as was Gasparino Barzizza.⁴⁴ In support of this view is the fact that none of the teachers mentioned in the history of humanism in *Italia illustrata* – not even Guarino or Vittorino da Feltre – receives a biography in *Contra Iudaeos et Gentes*. For Manetti is not interested in “minute and trivial matters” or “childish and frivolous investigations.” On the contrary, proper humanists, in his view, devote themselves more broadly to the “study of things human and divine.”

Manetti's disparagement of the *grammatici* resembles similar criticism familiar from Petrarch, who censured his friend Zanobi da Strada for exactly such teaching.⁴⁵ More importantly, it resembles the criticism leveled at a certain kind of humanism several decades earlier by Cino Rinuccini in his *Invettiva contro a certi calunniatori di Dante e di messer Francesco Petrarca e di*

⁴³ Manetti, *VSen*, 45: “ac demum satis esse duximus frivola haec et inutilia grammaticis perquirenda dimittere, quam tempus, cuiuscumque supplectilis pretiosissimum, in parvarum et minimarum rerum investigatione frustra contere. Itaque haec, qualiacumque sint, grammaticis ac litterarum dumtaxat professoribus solvenda dimittimus, atque hoc eis leviuscularum controversiarum opus iniungimus, ut diligentius et accuratius hinc inde librentur qui puerilia haec et frivola usque ad senectutem putant esse discenda quae ne pueris didicisse turpe erat.” Half a century later, it is precisely this sense of the word *grammaticus* that Angelo Poliziano would take pains to combat in his *Lamia*, endowing it instead with the grander sense of ‘philologist.’ See Angelo Poliziano, *Lamia*, pars. 68–72, in *Angelo Poliziano's Lamia: Text, Translation, and Introductory Studies*, ed. Christopher S. Celenza (Leiden, 2010). See also all four of the excellent introductory studies, but esp. pp. 39–41, for a concise treatment.

⁴⁴ For Giovanni, see Biondo, *II*, vi.25; for Barzizza, *ibid.*, vi.28.

⁴⁵ See Black, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, p. 31.

Messer Giovanni Boccacci (Invective against Certain Calumniators of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio).⁴⁶ There the lyric poet and teacher of rhetoric berates a younger generation of Florentine humanists just after the turn of the fifteenth century – specifically the circle around Bruni and Niccoli – for their obsession with the minutiae of Latin orthography and diphthongs and their disparagement of the city’s great vernacular poets. It is this same type of “erudite and learned men” to whom Manetti would like to spread the appreciation of the Three Crowns.

Manetti, then, is in direct polemical discourse with the kind of humanism portrayed in Bruni’s *Dialogi*, as well as with that reconstructed in Chapter 1 of this study. Much had, of course, changed between the first and fourth decades of the Quattrocento, and it would be incorrect to view Manetti as an epigone of Rinuccini.⁴⁷ Manetti does not pay “tribute to the arts of the trivium and the quadrivium,” as Rinuccini does. Indeed, he nowhere defends scholasticism against its detractors but simply portrays it, implicitly, as a setting for Dante’s and Petrarch’s humanism.⁴⁸ Nor does the *Vita* simply play out one side of a “philosophico-literary debate between defenders and accusers of the old medieval culture and the vernacular tradition.”⁴⁹ Manetti belongs to a different context, one in which, as noted earlier, Bruni ended up softening his original hard line. Bruni mel-
lowed as he slowly became the *éminence grise* of a movement that was now firmly established and that no longer had anything to fear from cultural competitors.⁵⁰ Moreover, his willingness to align himself with the cultural

⁴⁶ See Antonio Lanza, *Polemiche e berte letterarie nella Firenze del primo Quattrocento. Storia e testi* (Rome, 1972), pp. 92–100 and 259–267; Holmes, *Florentine Enlightenment*, ch. 1; Giuliano Tanturli, “Cino Rinuccini e la scuola di Santa Maria in Campo,” *Studi medievali*, 3rd ser., 17 (1976), pp. 625–674; Witt, *Footsteps*, pp. 402–403; and Garin, *L’umanesimo italiano*, pp. 33–34. Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, pp. 286–331, may be used with caution. Only a vernacular translation of this work is extant, but the original was, significantly, written in Latin (“perché direttamente indirizzato agli umanisti,” Lanza, *Polemiche e berte letterarie*, p. 93). It dates to the first decade of the fifteenth century; Witt argues more precisely for 1405/1406. I have not been able to ascertain the date of the Italian translation.

⁴⁷ Hans Baron, in contrast, does treat Manetti as an epigone of Rinuccini in *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, pp. 322–323. For a description of Rinuccini’s intellectual milieu, see Antonio Lanza, “Le polemiche tra umanisti e tradizionalisti nella Firenze tardogotica,” in Théa Picquet, Lucien Faggion, and Pascal Gandoulphe (eds.), *L’Humanisme italien de la Renaissance et l’Europe* (Aix-en-Provence, 2010), pp. 53–80.

⁴⁸ Interestingly, Eugenio Garin argues that Dante himself was “isolated, archaic, and anachronistic on the more properly philosophical and scientific territory” of the “Gothic university.” See *Rinascite e rivoluzioni*, pp. 74–75: “In realtà, in quella ‘università gotica’ . . . , Dante appare un isolato, arcaico e fuori tempo sul terreno più propriamente filosofico e scientifico.”

⁴⁹ Thus Lanza, *Polemiche e berte letterarie*, pp. 93 and 98, characterizes Cino’s *Invettiva*.

⁵⁰ See Hankins, “Humanism in the Vernacular”; and Hankins, “Petrarch and the Canon of Neo-Latin Literature,” pp. 905–922.

identity of his adopted city only could have increased after serving for years as chancellor and taking a more active role in Florentine politics.⁵¹ As for Niccolò Niccoli, the true *bête noire* of Rinuccini and the more culturally conservative Florentines, he had just died (1437) when Manetti wrote the *Vita*, and by then, having lost nearly all of his friends, his position no longer possessed authority.⁵² If Manetti aimed his text against the stragglers of what George Holmes called the “Florentine Avant-Garde,” even more so he sought to offer a corrective to a kind of humanism, especially as it had developed outside of Florence, which took the young, fiery Brunì as its model, the Brunì who had criticized the “squalor” of Salutati’s Latin in his letters (as we saw reported by Piccolomini) and who recognized no literature as worthy of the name that was not graced with Ciceronian charm. Piccolomini, Biondo, and Facio (and the humanism they represent) did not make their peace with vernacular literature as Brunì had, nor would they have had any civic or cultural reasons for doing so. The Three Crowns were not claimed by the cities and regions in which our first three authors operated – Rome, Naples, and the larger context of Italy and the Empire – nor was the Tuscan of Florence a language they had any stake in promoting. The humanism of Chapter 1 is a purist movement; Manetti, on the other hand, represents an eclectic strain.

An eclectic strain full of vigor, however. Rinuccini combined a humanist penchant for Ciceronian style with respect for the Three Crowns as early as the mid-1380s.⁵³ Manetti was writing fifty years later. And about thirty years after that Cristoforo Landino, professor of rhetoric and poetry at the Florentine Studio, would take the innovative step of teaching a course on Petrarch’s vernacular sonnets. As Eugenio Garin has noted, this decision amounted to a “defense of the vernacular tradition as an essential element of the renewed culture of humanism” – a defense that accorded fully with the cultural politics of Medici Florence.⁵⁴ In 1481 Landino then published his *Comento sopra la Comedia*, in the preface to which he outlined Florence’s grand cultural tradition of vernacular and Latin literature as well as of music, art, and architecture. The *Comento* on Dante was formally

⁵¹ For Brunì’s political involvement in Florence, see Hankins, “Life and Works,” vol. I, p. 10.

⁵² For Niccoli as the primary target of Rinuccini and others, see Lanza, *Polemiche e berte letterarie*, pp. 93–96.

⁵³ See Witt, *Footsteps*, pp. 366–370. Cf. also Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, pp. 332–353.

⁵⁴ Garin, *Rinascite e rivoluzioni*, p. 71: “difesa della tradizione volgare quale elemento integrante della rinnovata cultura umanistica.” See also the discussion of the lecture course as well as the summary of the *Comento sopra la Comedia* in Simona Foà, “Landino (Landini), Cristoforo,” in *DBI*, vol. LXIII (2004), pp. 428–433, at 429–430, 431.

presented to the *Signoria*, on which occasion Landino held a public oration, and the work went on to be a great publishing success throughout the sixteenth century. Garin explains that, in this context, Dante and Petrarch had unquestionably become classics: “both are consecrated *auctores*; both recognized as fathers of the new culture, of the *rinascita*, exalted among the *moderns* precisely because restorers of the *ancients*.”⁵⁵ Manetti gives earlier voice to this tradition, a long, distinguished, emphatically Florentine tradition not necessarily of defending scholasticism (as Rinuccini had) but rather of asserting the foundational role Dante and Petrarch played in the humanist turn – a turn towards the ancient authors as a source of cultural and moral guidance.

The Three Crowns: Fathers of humanism

One might well wonder at this point if it is still possible to speak of a distinct phenomenon called humanism, considering Manetti’s peculiarly Florentine view and the lengths to which he has gone in the *Vita* to integrate traditional scholasticism and vernacular literature with the new drive for classicizing Latin, all within the confines of the *studia humanitatis*. What saves the phenomenon, first, is Manetti’s own identification of certain of its elements as new – the resuscitation of poetry and good Latin letters, the revival of Greek studies, a cultural orientation towards classical antiquity – and the identity of many of these elements with those considered essential to humanism in Chapter 1. Second, Manetti puts his concept of humanism on a firm foundation by narrating a distinct history of development and by ascribing specific cultural characteristics to its foremost figures, thus portraying humanists as a discrete group of individuals bound together by a common history, shared traits, and a united cultural vision.

Manetti concurs with our previous authors about the importance of the revival of Latin for learning and culture, and he is also in accord with the general timeline they give for Latin’s ancient decline and modern reprise. Reading at greater length in the biography of Guido Cavalcanti in *Contra Judaeos et Gentes*:

Guido . . . was a highly educated man. He possessed a wide knowledge of important subjects, as much as was possible in that *illiterate and uncouth age*. Since at that time Latin style and the rhetorical art, not being held in high esteem, had lost all of their strength and vigor, he composed with great

⁵⁵ Garin, *Rinascite e rivoluzioni*, p. 72: “Della classicità di Dante e Petrarca nessuno dubita più. Entrambi sono *auctores* consacrati; entrambi riconosciuti padri della nuova cultura, della ‘rinascita’: esaltati fra i *moderni* proprio perché restauratori degli *antichi*.”

elegance some wonderful poems in the vernacular, which at that time was much prized.⁵⁶

All this changed with Petrarch's revitalization of good Latin ("elegantiam dicendi").

Turning back to the *Vita*, we read that Petrarch brought Latin "back to light out of darkness after it had been nearly defunct for over a thousand years." Following the historical paradigm established by Brunì in his *History of the Florentine People*, Manetti explains Latin's initial demise thus:

It had died, in the first place, because of the inhuman ferocity of the Roman emperors, who had wickedly oppressed the city of Rome with every sort of cruelty, slaughtering numerous upright and learned men, and secondly because of the savage rule of the Lombards, who sacked all of Italy during their two-hundred-and-four-year occupation.⁵⁷

Biondo and Piccolomini had given a similar chronology, agreeing that the general use of eloquent Latin ended more or less with the death of Augustine. Manetti basically concurs, but, following the judgment of his fellow Florentine Filippo Villani, he places the end of ancient eloquence in a different *auctor*: the poet Claudian.⁵⁸ Describing Petrarch's crowning with laurel in Rome, he explains, "among the ancient Greeks and Latins [it] was conferred solely upon emperors and the greatest poets." Manetti continues, "he alone deserved to be crowned poet laureate, a title which had not been granted for over nine hundred and fifty years, from the time of Claudian, who flourished under the elder Emperor Theodosius, until our Petrarca."⁵⁹ The difference between "over a thousand years" (as stated in *VP*, 6) and "over nine hundred and fifty years" (*VP*, 12) is relatively small and perhaps not worth observing. Manetti might have meant to equate

⁵⁶ Manetti, *CJEG*, 1: "Guido . . . vir apprime eruditus fuit. Nam et multarum et magnarum rerum, quantum aetas illa indocta et rudis pati et ferre posse videbatur, cognitionem habuit. Et quia ea tempestate elegantiae latinae et artis oratoriae facultas omnes vires cunctosque nervos suos penitus amiserat, cum in honorem non haberetur, nonnullas peregre cantilenas materno sermone, qui tunc in pretio putabatur, elegantissime composuit" (emphasis mine).

⁵⁷ Manetti, *VP*, 6: "ob inhumanam quandam primo Romanorum imperatorum crudelitatem, qui urbem Romam omni saevitiarum genere, crebris proborum et doctorum virorum trucidationibus, nefarie nimis vexaverant, ob saevissimum deinde Longobardorum dominatum, qui totam Italiam quattuor supra ducentos circiter annos occupatam penitus devastaverant." For Manetti's reliance on Brunì's paradigm of decline, see Manetti, *Biographical Writings*, p. 302, n. 8.

⁵⁸ Filippo Villani, *De origine civitatis florentie et de eiusdem famosis civibus*, ed. Giuliano Tanturli (Padua, 1997). Tanturli reports in full several different versions of the text, varying widely among one another. For Villani's treatment of Claudian, see pp. 68–72 (redaction A–A¹ xxi), 339–348 (redaction B²–B³, B II i), 431–433 (vernacular redaction B³, C I).

⁵⁹ Manetti, *VP*, 12: "qua apud veteres Graecos et Latinos imperatores egregiosque poetas tantummodo coronatos fuisse constat . . . Hanc poeticam lauream – per quinquaginta supra noningentos circiter annos a Claudiani temporibus (qui imperante seniore Theodosio floruit) usque ad hunc nostrum Petrarcham perpetuo intermissam – solus ipse non immerito assumpsit."

the two and to hold up Claudian as the last exponent of ancient Latin eloquence generally. To be safe (and respectful to Manetti's text), however, one could hypothesize that Petrarch was the first both to resurrect ancient Latin eloquence in prose and to revive it in poetry, the former strangely having died out before the latter. Such would be in accord, at least, with Manetti's insistence elsewhere on Petrarch's "peculiar and almost divine grace of excelling in both forms of composition."⁶⁰

At any rate, with this reference to Claudian, Manetti emphasizes that good Latin poetry is a particularly Florentine pursuit. For Claudian, although an Alexandrian Greek, was generally believed at the time to have been a Florentine (at least by his supposed fellow citizens): "hence an honor that long ago an ancient Florentine poet had been the last to obtain was renewed in the like manner by a modern Florentine bard, who received it after the passage of many years."⁶¹ Indulging yet again in Florentine chauvinism, Manetti implies that not only the renaissance of poetry, but poetry itself, is a Florentine affair. This focus on Florence is echoed in the *Contra Judaeos et Gentes*, where, as noted, all of the humanists are either Tuscan or Venetian.

The attention to Petrarch's poetic excellence underlines another foundational element of Manetti's idiosyncratic concept of Renaissance humanism: the rebirth of poetry, both vernacular and Latin. Dante was the first to play a part:⁶²

This exceptional poet was the first to awaken poetry to life after it had been moribund or asleep for about nine hundred years. He raised it from the

⁶⁰ Ibid., 8: "Solut, igitur Petrarcha, hac praecipua et paene divina gratia praeditus, in utroque dicendi genere valuit" (translation modified).

⁶¹ Ibid., 12: "ut quod florentinus et vetus poeta iamdiu antea ultimo accepisset, florentinus et novus vates eodem modo accipiens post tot annorum curricula renovaret." Claudian receives the first biography in Villani's *De origine civitatis*. See note 58 above. In accordance with the legend, Claudian was portrayed in a fresco cycle of Florentine *uomini illustri* in the Palazzo Vecchio, for which Salutati composed the epigram: "Egipto genitum nova me florentia civem / Legibus agnovit, magnis iam digna poetis. / Infernos raptus cecini pugnasque deorum, Cesareas laudes, necnon stiliconis honores." See Teresa Hankey, "Salutati's Epigrams for the Palazzo Vecchio at Florence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 22 (1959), pp. 363–365, at 364; and Nicolai Rubinstein, "Classical Themes in the Decoration of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 50 (1987), pp. 29–43. For the historical Claudian, see Alan Cameron, *Claudian: Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius* (Oxford, 1970). Cf. also the related treatment of poetic crowning and the Florentine connection in Manetti's funeral oration for Bruni: *Oratio funebris*, pp. cv–cxiv, esp. cxiv.

⁶² Manetti reports in *CJEG* that, prior to or coeval with Dante, Guido Cavalcanti had managed to compose "with great elegance some wonderful poems in the vernacular, which at that time was much prized." Nevertheless, in *VD* he chooses Dante as the sole protagonist of vernacular poetry's revival. Cf. Manetti, *CJEG*, 1: "nonnullas peregrinas cantilenas materno sermone, qui tunc in pretio putabatur, elegantissime composuit."

ground where it was lying prostrate, so that he seems to have recalled it from exile or restored its civic rights or brought it back to the light after it had lain in the darkness of the grave for many years. And not only did he bring it back to light, but he proved it to be perfectly consistent with our Catholic faith, just as if the ancient poets had somehow been divinely inspired to sing the sound and true doctrine.⁶³

Let us overlook this additional fifty-year shift in the decline of poetry. Dante was succeeded by Petrarch, and Petrarch by Boccaccio, who was “born for poetry.” Manetti comments:

I believe this succession of distinguished poets to be the work of nature herself, which caused those extraordinary geniuses to flourish around the same time, so that what had been lacking to the human race for almost a thousand years – namely, poetry – might be restored to it after so many centuries, at an opportune moment, almost as though on purpose. Otherwise, if it had lain in darkness any longer, poetry might be thought to have abandoned the human race completely.⁶⁴

Thus, thanks to the efforts of these three poets, all of whom were dedicated to the *studia humanitatis*, poetry – here celebrated in both its vernacular and Latin forms – had returned to Italy after an absence of nine hundred to over a thousand years.⁶⁵

The next resuscitations in Manetti’s Renaissance are standard chapters in the humanist revival of Latin eloquence as narrated by our first three

⁶³ Manetti, *VD*, 47: “Quippe poeticam, diu antea per noningentos circiter annos vel demortuam vel sopitam, summus hic poeta primum in lucem excitavit, iacentemque ac prostratam ita erexit ut vel ab exilio per eum revocata, vel postliminio reversa, vel e tenebris in lucem excitata fuisse videatur, cum iampridem tot annos demortua iacuisset. Ac non solum primum eam in lucem excitavit, sed cum sana etiam catholicaque nostrae fedei doctrina convenire mirabiliter demonstravit, perinde ac veteres poetae divino quodam spiritu afflati fuissent ac sanam et veram doctrinam cecinissent.”

⁶⁴ Manetti, *VB*, 1: “In hac itaque vicissitudinaria horum praestantium poetarum successione, huiusmodi acerrima eorum ingenia ideo iisdem paene temporibus ex ipsa natura pullulasse arbitror, ut in quo humanum genus per mille circiter annos destitutum fuisse videbatur, in eo – quasi opportune post tot saecula aliquantisper dedita opera – restauraretur, ne poetica ab hominibus omnino recessisse crederetur, si diutius in tenebris iacuisset.”

⁶⁵ One could resolve this time discrepancy by pointing to the fact that the three poets came from different generations. Although this might partially account for the different time spans given, nevertheless it would not account for how the revival of poetry could happen at three different times. The reasonable solution to this problem is to posit, as Manetti does in the above quotation, that the revival took place over the broad period from Dante to Boccaccio, and at the same time not to expect too much from the numbers, which are all too round to admit of precision anyway. One could also posit, as does Baldassarri generally about Manetti (“Clichés and Myth-Making”), that such statements do not have precise meaning due to the nature of humanist epideictic rhetoric; according to this line of thought, there is no problem to resolve because Manetti himself never meant to establish an exact chronology. Whatever the case may be, Manetti presents us at the very least with a general chronology.

authors: the hunt for manuscripts and the reprise of Greek in the Latin West. Yet here, too, Manetti adds his own twist by emphasizing the leading roles of Petrarch and Boccaccio, neither of whom were even mentioned in this regard by Piccolomini, Facio, or Biondo. After describing Petrarch's single-handed revival of good Latin, Manetti continues:

It was Petrarca, in fact, who first restored to us, by virtue of his unremitting zeal, a large number of Cicero's works that had been unknown and almost lost to the Italians for many centuries, and it was Petrarca who also collected his scattered epistles in the order in which we now read them.⁶⁶

And a bit later:

Dissatisfied with the Latin books commonly available at the time, he set out to search tirelessly for ancient manuscripts that would contain the works he knew to have been written by Varro, Cicero, and other learned men. At the age of twenty-five, for instance, he was in the Low Countries and Switzerland, as he himself attests, seeking books with great care.⁶⁷

Manetti is not so bold as to claim for Petrarch the responsibility for having restocked the entire library of classical antiquity, but he does put Petrarch at the founding of this key aspect of humanism. Interestingly, there is an important difference between the kinds of works found by Petrarch and those considered significant by Biondo. Manetti refers generically to Cicero's letters, whereas Biondo marks the sea change in eloquence specifically with the discovery of the *Letters to Atticus* (which he considered more eloquent and more carefully crafted than the *Familiares*) and especially of rhetorical works like *De oratore*, *Orator*, and *Brutus*, as well as with the restitution of Quintilian's complete text. As we have seen, Biondo goes so far as to state that the letters of Cicero available to Petrarch were insufficient for restoring ancient eloquence, and he excuses Petrarch's rude style by his ignorance of the right books. The availability of generically eloquent models was apparently not sufficient in Biondo's mind; more sublime examples had to be at hand, and he implies that theoretical works on rhetoric were necessary to supply proper understanding.⁶⁸ For Manetti, on the other

⁶⁶ Manetti, *VP*, 6: "Nam et primus complures Ciceronis libros per multa saecula Italīs antea occultos ac propemodum amissos sua singulari diligentia nobis restituit, atque eius epistulas, prius hinc inde varie dispersas, eo ordine quo nunc videmus in sua volumina redegit."

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 18: "Itaque non contentus latinae linguae libris qui per id tempus vulgo habebantur, vetustos codices quos et Varronem et Ciceronem aliosque doctissimos viros quondam posteris scriptos reliquisse noverat assidue perquirebat. Unde inter Belgas et Helvetios, sicut ipse testatur, viginti quinque aetatis annos natus accuratissime quaeritabat" (translation modified).

⁶⁸ Biondo, *II*, vi.26, 30. See also Chapter 1, p. 57.

hand, the simple discovery of Cicero's letters was a formative moment in humanism's revival of good Latin.

Now for Greek. Petrarch's searches for manuscripts were prompted by an "inexhaustible desire to read,"⁶⁹ and so was his "desire to learn Greek – a language utterly unusual and foreign at that time and, so to speak, repugnant to Italy."⁷⁰ Therefore he began to learn the language under the monk Barlaam. His progress, unfortunately, was fatally checked by the death of his teacher, and Greek would lie dormant a bit longer until taken up by Boccaccio, who is according to Manetti (at least in one passage) the real founder of Greek studies in Italy.⁷¹

Like Petrarch, Boccaccio was driven to learn Greek by a hunger left unsated by available Latin literature. And like Petrarch, he found a Greek to teach him the language: Leontius Pilatus. He hosted the teacher in his own home and secured for him "a public stipend to give public readings of Greek books. [Pilatus] is said to have been the first to give such public lectures in Greek in our city." Pilatus brought Greek manuscripts with him to Florence, and "it was said that no one before him had ever brought Greek books back to Tuscany."⁷² Modern scholars generally consider the instruction of Barlaam and Pilatus to be a false start before the gun properly went off with Chrysoloras.⁷³ Manetti, however, sees things differently:

These first fruits of Greek letters brought forth by the two distinguished poets seem to have provided a kind of seedbed which, finding in later times more fertile ground, germinated gradually day by day until they finally flourished in our times, bearing the richest fruits.⁷⁴

Only after citing this key intervention does Manetti pass on to the customary description of Chrysoloras' contribution. Yet he will not suffer

⁶⁹ Manetti, *VP*, 18: "inexhausta quadam legendi cupiditate ferebatur."

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 19: "linguam graecam, per ea tempora omnino novam et peregrinam atque, ut ita dixerim, ab Italia longe abhorrentem, discere concupivit."

⁷¹ Actually, it seems that Petrarch's poor progress in Greek was rather the result of his unwillingness to learn it. According to Roberto Weiss, *Medieval and Humanist Greek: Collected Essays* (Padua, 1977), p. 179, Petrarch had many opportunities to learn Greek but spurned them because of his distaste for Greek culture and religion: "si può insomma dire che se il Petrarca non imparò il greco fu proprio perché non lo volle imparare" (cited in Hankins, "Greek Studies in Italy," p. 331). Manetti offers a brief history of Greek studies in *VB*, 6–8. See below.

⁷² Manetti, *VB*, 6: "atque ita curavit ut publica mercede ad legendum codices graecos publice conduceretur; quod ei primo in civitate nostra contigisse dicitur ut graece ibidem publice legeret"; "quod ante eum nullus fecisse dicebatur ut in Etruriam graeca volumina retulisset."

⁷³ See Hankins, "Greek Studies in Italy."

⁷⁴ Manetti, *VB*, 6: "Huiusmodi veteres duorum tam insignium poetarum graecarum litterarum primitiae quasi seminarium quoddam exitisse videntur, quod uberiorem terram postea nactum gradatim adeo in dies pullulavit ut, temporibus nostris florens, uberrimos iam fructus peperit."

the Byzantine diplomat to take all the glory. Summing up the permanent revival of Greek, Manetti writes:

This Manuel Chrysoloras was the fountainhead from whom many eminent disciples flowed, who afterwards disseminated the Greek language, as though it were a new seed of letters, not only through Tuscany but also through several of the chief regions of Italy as well . . . But someone might ask: why say all this about Greek letters? What is your point? *My point is to show that we owe all our knowledge of the Greeks to our Boccaccio*, who first brought back to Tuscany at his own expense a teacher and Greek books which had previously lain far away from us, over land and sea.⁷⁵

Here it seems as if Manetti truly attributes the revival of Greek to Boccaccio. Before putting too much stock in this affirmation, however, a parallel passage should be considered from the biography of Niccolò Niccoli found in the coeval *De illustribus longaevis*:

It is obvious that the learned Chrysoloras taught Greek to many men, as though planting a seedbed, and that all this is something for which our Niccolò deserves the credit, as it was he who called this foreign teacher to Florence and Tuscany “from the heart of Greece,” as they say.⁷⁶

A few lines earlier in this *vita*, however, Manetti states that “our Niccolò” does not actually deserve the credit all alone, but that he had “joined forces with Coluccio Salutati . . . to bring to Florence over land and sea from far-off Constantinople the most distinguished of the Greeks, Manuel Chrysoloras, in order to have him lecture here.”⁷⁷ Furthermore, as opposed to Petrarch and Boccaccio, who learned Greek because they were still

⁷⁵ Ibid., 8: “Hic est ille Emmanuel Chrysoloras a quo multi peregrinii discipuli primitus profluxerunt, qui postea peregrinam Graecorum linguam non modo per Etruriam sed per nonnullas etiam nobiliores Italiae partes, quasi novum litterarum semen . . . Sed quorsum haec tam multa de litteris graecis, dicet quispiam? Quorsum? Ut totum hoc quicquid apud nos Graecorum est Boccaccio nostro feratur acceptum, qui primus praeceptorem et libros graecos, a nobis per longa terrarum marisque spatia distantes, propriis sumptibus in Etruriam reduxit” (emphasis mine). Incidentally, Manetti’s source is Boccaccio’s own *De genealogia deorum*, XV, 7, 3–7, where Boccaccio describes his founding of Greek studies in a passage ostensibly aimed at defending his citations of Greek poetry in Latin writings. The importance of this passage of Boccaccio as a source for the history of Greek in the Renaissance has been highlighted by Albanese, “Mehrsprachigkeit,” pp. 32–33. For the passage in question, see Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogie deorum gentilium*, ed. Vittore Zaccaria (Milan, 1998), pp. 1540–1545.

⁷⁶ Manetti, *DIL*, 23: “Nam ab hoc eruditissimo viro multos graece edoctos, velut seminarium quoddam, profluxisse manifestum est, quae omnia a Nicolao nostro accepta referre debemus, qui peregrinum praeceptorem e media, ut aiunt, Graecia Florentiam usque in Etruriam evocavit.”

⁷⁷ Ibid., 23: “Proinde cum Colucio Salutato . . . dedita opera Manuelem quendam Chrysoloram constantinopolitanum, Graecorum omnium facile principem, e Constantinopoli per tot maris terrarumque spatia legendi causa Florentiam usque accersiverant.” Note the linguistic echo to the Boccaccio passage in “over land and sea.”

hungry after having devoured Latin literature, Niccoli did so for a reason that finds an echo in Biondo: “since without this knowledge the study of Latin seemed crippled and weak.”⁷⁸

One must wonder, then, like Manetti’s imaginary interlocutor, “What is the point?” Why cite Boccaccio as the true founder of Greek studies, while noting the assistance of Petrarch, and then in a related text cite Niccoli as the true founder, while noting the assistance of Salutati? Here it is useful to recall the caveat of Stefano U. Baldassarri, who, in line with his criticism of Manetti’s “mosaic technique” of composition, counsels caution generally when reading humanist Latin literature.⁷⁹ In Baldassarri’s judicious view, one should be wary when any single individual is memorialized as *the* anything, in light of the humanist tendency to hyperbole. Still, it might not be necessary to take an entirely reductive approach to these passages. For what matters here is not their truth or sincerity, but rather the way Manetti tries to place the Three Crowns in the context of the Renaissance and the *studia humanitatis*. He knows that Chrysoloras is the most important cause for the permanent revival of Greek throughout Italy – as he makes clear in both of the passages referred to above – and also that Niccoli and Salutati deserve the credit for bringing him to Florence. Nevertheless, the central aim of his *Trium illustrium poetarum florentinorum vita* is, as noted at its outset, to “have the great merits [of the Three Crowns] . . . spread to the erudite and the learned, who until now have despised and dismissed all works of vernacular literature.” What better way to save the reputation of these vernacular writers among “the learned and erudite” – i.e., humanists – than by stressing their importance for the revival not only of classical Latin but also of Greek?

It is this same desire to legitimate the Three Crowns’ status as humanists that motivates Manetti’s calculated praise of Dante’s, Petrarch’s, and Boccaccio’s works. In the *comparatio* concluding the *Vita*, he declares Dante’s general preeminence in learning; Petrarch’s superiority to Dante “in broad knowledge of Latin letters and the sure mastery of ancient history,” as well as “Latin verse and prose”; and Boccaccio’s overall distinction for “knowledge of Greek letters . . . and prose works in the vernacular.”⁸⁰ Except for the vernacular literature, these pursuits would have earned the respect of

⁷⁸ Ibid., 23: “sine quibus nostra haec studia manca ac debilia esse videbantur.”

⁷⁹ Baldassarri, “Clichés and Myth-Making,” esp. pp. 16–17. Baldassarri also notes the similarities between these passages, among others.

⁸⁰ Manetti, *VB*, 15: “cum integra latinarum litterarum scientia, tum etiam certa veterum historiarum perceptione superatur”; “In carmine quoque et soluta oratione Dantes ab eo item vincitur”; “in graecarum scilicet litterarum cognitione . . . et in materna ac soluta oratione.”

Niccoli, the young Bruni, and the whole humanist tradition represented in Chapter 1. As we shall see below, it is significant that unlike Bruni, whose praise in the *Vite di Dante e del Petrarca* was set primarily in civic terms (Dante was a patriot and Petrarch's works are an ornament to the city), Manetti chooses to highlight specifically literary accomplishments.

Yet Manetti is not content simply to bolster the humanist credentials of the Three Crowns; he also wants to put them at the origins of a tradition of cultural flourishing and excellence that not only imitates but equals, and might just surpass, antiquity. Thus he repeatedly compares them positively to the ancients. He reports Salutati's eulogy of Boccaccio: "yielding to none of the ancients."⁸¹ He likens Dante to Cicero for "making his peace with books again" after his exile, and to Cato for being "a glutton for books."⁸² He puts Dante in the company of Homer and Virgil for being "the first Italian to ennoble the art of writing poetry in the vernacular," since they achieved the same in their respective culturo-linguistic contexts.⁸³ He attributes Dante's choice to pursue poetry to a desire to attain the greatest glory possible:

Good poets, in fact, were at the time more difficult to find than philosophers, mathematicians, and even theologians – as has been the case since the world's inception and continues to be so in our own times. Good *poetae* and *oratores* have always been very rare.⁸⁴

Thus Dante aspired to the glory of *poetae* and *oratores* – of humanists – who were rare even in antiquity, and there is no doubt but that he attained it. Manetti even goes so far as to compare Dante with Socrates, who had been a humanist icon since Petrarch and Salutati and was an increasingly well-known figure (and properly bowdlerized for a Christian audience) thanks to

⁸¹ Ibid., 13: "nulli cessurus veterum."

⁸² For Cicero, Manetti, *VD*, 32. For Cato, ibid., 44: "helluo libri."

⁸³ Manetti, *VD*, 39: "Hanc suam materni sermonis poeticam hic noster poeta primus apud Italos . . . non secus nobilitavit." Here Manetti gives classical justification for the vernacular's value, and he might be implying that Greek and Latin were also natural languages. Latin's status as an artificial or natural language was a hotly contested point in the first half of the Quattrocento. See Mazzocco, *Linguistic Theories in Dante and the Humanists*; Fubini, *Umanesimo e secolarizzazione*, pp. 1–75; and Mirko Tavoni, *Latino, grammatica, volgare. Storia di una questione umanistica* (Padua, 1984).

⁸⁴ Ibid., 46: "Etenim poetae boni ea tempestate quam aut philosophi aut mathematici aut denique theologi longe pauciores erant, quod etiam antea, a conditione orbis terrarum usque ad haec nostra tempora, repetitum fuisse constat. Semper enim poetae boni et oratores paucissimi fuerunt" (translation modified). Note the contrast to Facio's *De viris illustribus*, in which *poetae* and *oratores* far outnumber *philosophi* and *theologi*.

Bruni's translations of a significant portion of the Platonic corpus.⁸⁵ Dante is compared to Socrates once (explicitly) for his natural predisposition to sensuality, once (implicitly) for his unbelievable capacity for intellectual absorption.⁸⁶

Manetti's praise of Petrarch is particularly important considering the shabby treatment the latter received in Chapter 1 (and will continue to receive in subsequent chapters of this study). For Aeneas Sylvius and Biondo, Petrarch was an inspiring figure but ultimately worthy of admiration for little more than his passion and diligence. In their view, his works show either little or no eloquence. For Manetti, on the other hand, Petrarch's Latin was and is (still) eloquent. At least, such is the impression he would like to convey. In one place he says, "with his unparalleled eloquence he presented himself as a model for future writers both in prose and in verse";⁸⁷ and in a parallel passage in *De illustribus longaevis*, Petrarch is said to have "presented himself as a model for *us* to imitate."⁸⁸ James Hankins has argued that Manetti's careful phrasing ("he presented himself . . .") was meant to distance himself subtly from Petrarch's own judgment; if so, it might reveal a greater affinity than initially seemed the case between his assessment of Petrarch's style and that formulated by Aeneas Sylvius and Biondo.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the fact remains that Manetti does his best to portray Petrarch's style in a positive light. Moreover, like Dante, Petrarch is compared to Cato, although in this case for his late attempt to learn Greek.⁹⁰ Also like Dante, "his chief concern in composing [his] many writings seems to have been to bequeath a glory after death not at all inferior to the one he enjoyed in his lifetime – nay, an even greater one."⁹¹ His fame was so great that "all the peoples of every country possessing some degree of culture were seen to venerate his name."⁹² Significantly, the Latin word translated here as "possessing some degree of culture" is *humaniores*,

⁸⁵ James Hankins, "Socrates in the Italian Renaissance," in M.B. Trapp (ed.), *Socrates, from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 179–208.

⁸⁶ Sensuality: Manetti, *VD*, 43; intellectual absorption: *ibid.*, 44. Although the explicit comparison here is to a description by Cicero of Cato, a deaf ear cannot be turned to the repeated echoes of Socrates' similar behavior in Manetti's own *Vita Socratis*: *VSoc*, 16, 28, and 43.

⁸⁷ Manetti, *VP*, 7: "Et suo quodam excellentiori quodam genere dicendi seipsum posteris in soluta oratione et carmine ad imitandum praestitit" (translation modified).

⁸⁸ Manetti, *DIL*, 4: "... et suo excellentiori quodam genere dicendi se ipsum nobis ad imitandum praestitit" (translation modified; emphasis mine).

⁸⁹ Hankins, "Petrarch and the Canon," n. 15. ⁹⁰ Manetti, *VP*, 19.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 22: "Quas ob res in hac tanta scriptorum suorum confectione id praecipue curasse visus est, ne moriens minorem, vel maiorem potius, nominis sui gloriam relinqueret quam vivens reportasset."

⁹² *Ibid.*, 8: "Cuncti etiam paulo humaniores omnium gentium populi eius nomen venerari videbantur" (translation modified).

linguistically and culturally related to *studia humanitatis*. The association is clear: real humanists honor Petrarch.

The excellence of the Three Crowns is carried forward, in Manetti's account, by the humanists who sprouted from the "seedbed" they prepared. The biography of Coluccio Salutati in the *De illustribus longaevis* offers a very different picture from that presented by Aeneas Sylvius, who criticized him for his poor Latin style:

he was naturally inclined and constantly spurred to take up rhetoric and poetry . . . It can scarcely be described how much praise and glory he attained in these disciplines, for to all the gifts that nature had bestowed upon him he added so much diligence in reading and practice that he easily came to surpass all his contemporaries, as if he had been born and made for these studies by some god. The many literary works in both genres that he left for future generations to read bear witness to this.⁹³

The intervention of "some god" brings to mind Boccaccio's similar beatitude, and the extended praise of his works recalls the (self-)assessment of Petrarch as "a model for us to imitate." Yet, as in his praise of Petrarch, here, too, Manetti judiciously avoids commenting directly on the quality of Salutati's style, preferring to focus instead on his diligence and his excellence in comparison with his contemporaries. Rather than call attention to the shortcomings of these figures, Manetti brushes over their imperfections in his portrayal of a general age of continuous flourishing. Thus, unlike Piccolomini, who seemed to relish Bruni's rebuke of his teacher's stylistic imprisonment in the literary "squalor of his age," Manetti notes with pride that Salutati was honored with the laurel wreath after death, thus putting him in the company of Petrarch and making him "just like the ancient poets many centuries earlier."⁹⁴ Salutati is also praised for his way of life; the description of his reaction to his son's death is the perfect portrait of Stoic fortitude:

Indeed, during the whole illness he never absented himself from his son's sickbed, so that he was there to inhale his last breath; but he immediately laid out his son's body, closed his eyelids with his own hands, then his lips, and arranged his hands and arms in the shape of a cross. Finally, having

⁹³ Manetti, *DIL*, 12–13: "ad oratoriam et poeticam, suapte natura et quotidianis quibusdam stimulis, agebatur. . . . Quibus quidem in rebus quantum laudis et gloriae consequeretur vix dici potest, siquidem cunctis naturae muneribus ornatus tantam legendi et exercendi sui diligentiam adhibuit ut ceteris sui aetatis hominibus facile praestitisse et quasi ad ea natus et ab aliquo deo factus esse videretur. Testes huius rei sunt plura litterarum monumenta quae in utraque facultate posteris legenda reliquit" (translation modified).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14: "ut instar veterum poetarum . . . post multa temporum curricula."

looked at his face again and again, he departed – wondrous to say – without showing any sign of sorrow.⁹⁵

Here is yet another implicit positive comparison of a major figure in the history of humanism to the excellence of the ancients.

Niccolò Niccoli, whose importance in relation to Greek studies was seen above, receives even better treatment than the other humanists. For in addition to being likened to the ancients (to Cato, as were Dante and Petrarch),⁹⁶ he is the only one said to have surpassed them. Specifically, Manetti is awed by Niccoli's donation of his personal book collection to found a public library upon his death:

The more I think about his bequest of so many noble volumes, the more I am convinced that this admirable act is enough to put him beyond praise. As a matter of fact, leaving aside poets and orators, was there ever any philosopher who bequeathed a library like this?

Manetti explains that, of the greatest philosophers, neither Plato nor Aristotle even makes reference to his books in his will. Theophrastus does, but only to make a personal dedication.

He did not, however, intend to establish a public library, as did our Niccolò, in which the books would be splendidly and well preserved as a perpetual memorial to the donor and for the eternal benefit of all scholars. It is impossible to imagine the high praises that writers would have showered on the bequest of such a splendid and precious library – not a private but a public one – if it had been founded in those ancient times, in what might be called the age of learning.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Ibid., 15: “ab eius namque latere toto aegrotationis suae tempore numquam discedebat ut extremum filii spiritum forte hauriret, quem ut toto pectore accepit, illico supinum cadaver statuit, palpebras oculorum propriis manibus composuit, labia clausit, manus insuper et brachia in crucem constituit. Ad extremum, cum vultus eius etiam atque etiam intueretur, nullum maestitiae signum, mirabile tactu, exinde discedens prae se tulit.” Cf. Garin, *L'umanesimo italiano*, pp. 69–72, who portrays Manetti himself as a staunch anti-Stoic.

⁹⁶ Like Dante, he is called a “glutton for books,” *ibid.*, 29.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 31: “Hanc solam tantorum ac tam nobilium librorum legationem mecum ipse considerans tacti facere soleo ut ex hoc uno eius dignissimo facto satis hominem laudare non posse putem. Qualis enim, omissis poetis et oratoribus, philosophus umquam fuit qui huiusmodi librariae dumtaxat suppellectilis testamentum faceret? . . . non publice, ut Nicolaus noster, bibliothecam fieri et construere voluit, in qua ad perpetuam rei memoriam et ad perennem quandam doctorum hominum utilitatem optime simul atque speciosissime reconderebantur. Quare si huiusmodi tam praeclarae ac tam pretiosae suppellectilis non privata, sed publica et communis omnium legatio prae illis temporibus et eruditibus, ut ita dixerim, saeculis instituta fuisset, quantis et quam summis in caelum laudibus a scriptoribus efferretur non satis dici posset.”

At least in this one respect, Niccoli surpasses the greatest ancient philosophers; and thus his own time, with its “poets and orators,” surpasses “the age of learning.”⁹⁸

Holy humanism

Manetti portrays a continuous line of great humanists from Dante, through Salutati and Niccoli, to the great Florentines and Venetians of his own day. He depicts a period of cultural flourishing that stands up to the ancients and includes vernacular and Latin literature, scholasticism and eloquence, all of which he packs into the general category of the *studia humanitatis*. This constitutes a radical expansion of what humanism meant to Piccolomini, Biondo, and Facio, but the limit of its significance has not yet been sounded. For Manetti adds another new aspect to the concept of humanism, one that brings it to a higher plane: the choice to be made between the active and the contemplative life. This is *the* standard by which Manetti makes his Plutarchan comparison of the Three Crowns.⁹⁹ Specifically, the *studia humanitatis* offers for the first time (outside the monastery) the possibility of shunning the active life of civic participation and employment in preference for a quiet existence of contemplation and study. At the highest level, the contemplative life turns into an opportunity for holiness, and the *studia humanitatis* becomes the direct path to beatitude.¹⁰⁰

Although coinciding on many essential points, in this respect Manetti diverges noticeably from the position of Eugenio Garin, according to whom “early humanism” – meaning humanism from Petrarch through the whole

⁹⁸ In point of fact, we know of several public libraries donated by private individuals in Roman antiquity. The earliest was the bequest of Gaius Asinius Pollio. See T. Keith Dix and George W. Houston, “Public Libraries in the City of Rome: From the Augustan Age to the Time of Diocletian,” *Mélange de l'École française de Rome: Antiquité*, 118 (2006), pp. 671–717. Literary references to ancient public libraries are found in several Roman authors including the Elder (Natural History, 7.115 and 35.10) and Younger Pliny (Ep., 1.8), Ovid (Tristia, 3.1), Suetonius (Caesar, 44; Augustus, 29), and Aulus Gellius (Attic Nights, 7.17, 11.17, 16.8). I am indebted to Tom Hendrickson for these references.

⁹⁹ Manetti, VB, 14: “Hoc ergo tamquam principio quodam vere in hac nostra comparatione praesupposito.”

¹⁰⁰ On the issue of the contemplative and the active life in Renaissance humanism, see Garin, *L'umanesimo italiano*, pp. 25–132; Paul Oskar Kristeller, “The Active and the Contemplative Life in Renaissance Humanism,” in Brian Vickers (ed.), *Arbeit, Musse, Meditation. Betrachtungen zur “Vita activa” und “Vita contemplativa”* (Zürich, 1985), pp. 133–152; Victoria Kahn, “Coluccio Salutati on the Active and Contemplative Lives,” in Vickers (ed.), *Arbeit, Musse, Meditation*, pp. 153–179; Letizia A. Panizza, “Active and Contemplative in Lorenzo Valla: The Fusion of Opposites,” in Vickers (ed.), *Arbeit, Musse, Meditation*, pp. 181–223; Ursula Rombach, *Vita activa und vita contemplativa bei Cristoforo Landino* (Stuttgart, 1991), esp. pp. 33–55; and Paul A. Lombardo, “Vita Activa versus Vita Contemplativa in Petrarch and Salutati,” *Italica*, 59 (1982), pp. 83–92.

first half of the fifteenth century – “was a glorification of civic life and of the construction of an earthly city by man.”¹⁰¹ In Garin’s view, *primo umanesimo* entailed a commitment to the active life, to the usefulness, the applicability of *humanae litterae* to the here and now. Even Petrarch’s “withdrawal into solitude” he interpreted in a social and civic key.

[Petrarch] insisted above all that it is necessary to find first one’s own self and to discover oneself as a man among men. The love of the fatherland and the love of one’s neighbor are not only not incompatible with, but are closely connected with, the inward education which is the condition of all fruitful earthly activity . . . Solitude was not a monastic retirement into a barbarous isolation, but an initiation into a truer society, into a more effective form of love. The appeal in favor of inwardness . . . has nothing to do with isolation as usually understood, but is an exaltation of the world of man, of the world of values and of actions, of language and of the sociability that links men through time and space and defies all limits.¹⁰²

Hence Petrarch’s distaste for scholasticism, which he saw as “pure contemplation” disconnected from real life. And “even though he did not actually defend the primacy of virtue active in this world, he insisted nevertheless upon the necessity of recognizing its value side by side with that of contemplative virtue.”¹⁰³ Garin, arguing on the basis of another text, the *De excellentia et praestantia hominis*, fits Manetti into this tradition, summarizing the Florentine’s worldview thus: “man shines mainly through his earthly works, in his daily construction of the earthly city, in the serious dedication to civic life.”¹⁰⁴ A radically different picture emerges from Manetti’s biographical works. That humanists could take various positions on whether the active or the contemplative life was superior, and also that they were fully capable of recognizing the relative merits of each path for different kinds of people, was pointed out by Kristeller.¹⁰⁵ The discrepancy seems quite important in this case. For the treatise on the dignity of man was written at the behest of a philohumanist patron, Alfonso the Magnanimous, as a response to the pessimism about man’s nature embodied in Pope Innocent III’s *De contemptu mundi*. In contrast, Manetti composed the *Vita* as an apology for the Three Crowns with a specifically humanist

¹⁰¹ Garin, *Italian Humanism*, p. 78 [original Italian = *L’umanesimo italiano*, p. 94]. Garin explains his position fully in the first two chapters of this work (*L’umanesimo italiano*, pp. 25–97; *Italian Humanism*, pp. 18–81).

¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 20–21 [*L’umanesimo italiano*, pp. 28–29].

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 25 [*L’umanesimo italiano*, p. 33].

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 60 [*L’umanesimo italiano*, p. 74]. See pp. 56–60 [69–74] for Manetti generally and the concept of the dignity of man.

¹⁰⁵ Kristeller, “The Active and the Contemplative Life,” pp. 138–143.

audience in mind. Indeed, he intended it in part as a complement, if not a rebuttal, to Bruni's *Vite di Dante e del Petrarca*, whose primary criterion for judgment was not literary but the civic contribution of the two poets. Furthermore, Manetti intended his biography of Niccolò Niccoli, another text of great relevance for this issue, as a mirror of the ideal humanist. Considering the centrality of the Florentine milieu for the promotion of the active life, not to mention for Garin's interpretation of humanism generally, we should give particular weight to Manetti's dissent when trying to reconstruct how humanists viewed this issue with regard to their own activity as humanists.¹⁰⁶

When it came to declaring in these biographical writings which kind of life was more amenable to humanistic pursuits, Manetti's sympathies were clearly with the contemplative life. His position emerges distinctly in the biography of Dante. Although Manetti praises the poet's civic participation (office-holding and ambassadorial duties) and devotion to his city (up to the point of his exile), he does so with great reservation.¹⁰⁷ At one point he sighs, "We can only imagine what an extraordinary man this divine poet could have been if he had been granted the opportunity to study with greater calm and tranquility, rather than in such uncertain and tempestuous conditions."¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, Manetti does not hide the fact that Dante clearly preferred the active life and only devoted himself to letters when excluded from it. Accordingly Dante is twice compared to Cicero for having "made his peace with books again"¹⁰⁹ in compensation for his forced retirement from political life. Almost to his chagrin, Manetti is forced to admit Dante's superiority to the other Two Crowns despite the poet's preference for the active life:

Having set everything else aside and devoted themselves solely to [the contemplative] life, Petrarca and Boccaccio should have surpassed Dante, for they led longer, more quiet and peaceful lives. Yet this is not true at all; in fact, although Dante did not reach old age and never enjoyed much tranquility in his life . . . , he rapidly succeeded in attaining a vast knowledge of things human and divine, thanks to the almost divine excellence of his intellect.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 140–143. Florence's centrality for Garin's understanding of Quattrocento humanism is implicit throughout *L'umanesimo italiano*.

¹⁰⁷ Manetti, *VB*, 14–15.

¹⁰⁸ Manetti, *VD*, 38: "Quod si quietiora ac tranquilliora non autem fluctuantia et procellosa studia divinus poeta habuisset, qualem et quantum virum futurum coniectura augurari possumus."

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 32 and 38: "in gratiam rursus cum libris redire."

¹¹⁰ Manetti, *VB*, 15: "Petrarcha itaque et Boccacius huic soli, ceteris posthabitis, dediti, eum profecto superare debuerunt, quo quidem et diuturniorem et longe quietiorem ac pacatiorem vitam

Despite Manetti's reservations about worldly engagement, a fruitful combination of the active and contemplative lives could be found among lesser lights. Salutati would seem to have enjoyed the most success:

He wrote all this and much more while deeply involved in both private and public business. He looked after his large family with ten children while carrying on his shoulders the whole weight of the city as chancellor of the Florentine people. He died happily at seventy-six, leaving a rather ample patrimony to his many young sons, together with a large number of books and the singular glory of his name. His above-mentioned books won for him the laurel crown.¹¹¹

A less happy but still successful mix of the two kinds of life is attributed to Leonardo Bruni. After devoting a whole page to the Aretine's numerous works, Manetti observes:

And he wrote all this while leading a very busy life, partly agitated by the constant instability of the Roman curia, in which he served diligently for many years as papal secretary under various popes, partly distracted hither and yon by the affairs of the Florentine people, whose chancellor he was for a long time, and partly burdened by his own family cares. So his literary achievements should be considered even more admirable and praiseworthy than if he had written so many lengthy works while leading a quiet and leisured life.¹¹²

These examples of Bruni and Salutati show that Manetti was not opposed to the active life in principle. On the contrary, Boccaccio's biography shows that he respected the need for work, money, and patronage, even if they might be seen as necessary evils, in order for studies not to be hindered. The third Crown "was often preoccupied by his poverty, for he saw it obstructing the smooth course of the studies whose heights he hoped to

tenuerunt. At id longe secus est; quamquam enim Dantes neque senuerit neque etiam id quod datum est vitae tranquillum habuerit. . . , ob quamdam tamen divinam ingenii sui excellentiam magnam humanarum et divinarum rerum cognitionem brevi tempore comparavit."

¹¹¹ Manetti, *DIL*, 14: "Atque haec omnia pluraque alia in maximis privatarum et publicarum rerum occupationibus memoriae mandavit. Magnum namque familiae ac decem liberorum onus gubernabat et florentini populi scriba omne civitatis pondus suis humeris sustinebat . . . Nam septuagesimo sexto aetatis suae anno feliciter obiit; quippe amplo satis patrimonio [et] pluribus adolescentibus filiis et magna librorum copia simul cum singulari quadam nominis sui gloria relictis, ob memorata rerum suarum monumenta lauream promeretur."

¹¹² Manetti, *CJEG*, 31: "Atque haec omnia ipsum in vita semper occupatissima – partim continuis romanae curiae fluctibus agitatam, in qua quidem per multos annos pluribus summis pontificibus in secretariatus officio diligentissime inserviverat, partim florentini populi, cuius scriba diutius fuerat, negotiis hinc inde distractum, partim denique rei familiaris molibus oppressum – scripsisse constat. Quod admirabilius ac longe laudabilius fore non iniuria existimatur et creditur quam si in vita quieta et otiosa talia tantaque scripsisset."

reach.” Nevertheless he refused to find a remedy. Manetti’s description has the odor of criticism:

By nature he was so irascible and resentful that, though terribly harassed by lack of money, he never consented to live at any prince’s court, not even for a short while. That is why, in my opinion, he was never satisfied with his resources and why his writings are filled with bitter complaints about his conditions in life.¹¹³

Lest this passage be seen as a justification for money-making and profit, attention should be given to the beginning of the same biography. There Boccaccio’s early education in an abacus school and subsequent apprenticeship to a merchant, said to have been forced upon him by his father “for the sake of gain,”¹¹⁴ are described as “an irreparable waste of time, for his nature abhorred these money-grubbing arts and seemed particularly suited to literary studies.”¹¹⁵ Similar language occurs in the biography of Niccoli, who “put aside all business matters as trivial and useless and turned to the study of the Latin language,”¹¹⁶ for he “never longed to amass wealth like the greedy.”¹¹⁷ Manetti’s position is opposed to that of, say, Leonardo Bruni, who was the first modern to provide a theoretical defense of wealth in terms of virtue.¹¹⁸ Instead he sets the contemplative life of study against and above the active life of commerce, which in comparison he calls “money-grubbing,” “a waste of time,” and “trivial and useless.” Although himself the active inheritor of healthy commercial interests, Manetti in no way sanctions a life purely or predominantly dedicated to amassing wealth.¹¹⁹

¹¹³ Manetti, *VB*, 12: “Suapte natura adeo indignabundus erat ut, quamquam tenuitate patrimonii vehementer angeretur, cum nullis tamen terrarum principibus commorari vel paululum tolleraret; ex quo factum esse arbitror ut, numquam rebus suis contentus, pluribus scriptorum suorum locis statum suum vehementius deploraret.”

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4: “lucranda gratia.”

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2: “se nihil aliud egisse quam irrecuperabile tempus incasum contrivisse confirmat, quoniam suapte natura ab huiusmodi quaestoriis artibus abhorrebat ac litterarum studiis aptior videbatur.”

¹¹⁶ Manetti, *DIL*, 17: “omnibus mercaturis velut frivolis et inanibus rebus praetermissis, ad latinae linguae cognitionem se contulisse dicitur.”

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21: “Neque postea ullo umquam tempore aut comparandis opibus, ut cupidi, inhiavit.”

¹¹⁸ Bruni made the argument in the dedicatory letter to Cosimo de’ Medici of his translation of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Oeconomics*. Text in Bruni, *Sulla perfetta traduzione*, pp. 262–263. An older edition is available in Bruni, *Humanistisch-philosophische Schriften*, pp. 120–121. An English translation with introduction, along with excerpts of Bruni’s notes to the text, is available in *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, pp. 300–317.

¹¹⁹ For the wealth and commercial activity of Manetti and his family, see Martines, *The Social World*, pp. 131–138 and 176–191.

Boccaccio's case shows that Manetti respected the need to work in order to support one's studies if necessary, but his ideal was a life of cultivated leisure. Its fulfillment can be seen in Niccoli:

Being thus free of all public and private concerns, he enjoyed leisure – not the indolent and worthless kind, but rather leisure of a cultivated and nobler sort. Accordingly he spent his time partly reading, partly transcribing old manuscripts, and partly sharing in the affairs of his friends. Whatever time was left over he spent amassing and collecting books from every source.¹²⁰

Leisure, like wealth, can be used for both noble and ignoble purposes. It can be a means to a life of study, or it can be desired for its own sake and thus squandered. In this respect, and also in another as we shall soon see, Niccoli appears as the humanist *par excellence*, an amasser not of wealth but of books.

Petrarch took the ideal of noble leisure to a higher level. Having no contact with civic affairs (he was born an exile) and wary of the conditions of service, he is said to have shunned offers to join several courts. In his younger years he was, admittedly, affiliated with courts in both Avignon and Milan, in the latter even distinguishing himself as a diplomat.¹²¹ But he tended to separate himself not only from mundane duties but even from human contact. His first retreat was “the Sorgue,” a spring outside of Avignon where “he led a retired life for many years, completing the studies that enabled him to leave behind him so many works.”¹²² The second was Arquà, outside of Padua, where

he finally embraced a solitary life as more befitting the study of things human and divine. Accordingly, he renounced all worldly pomp and honors and went to live a retired life in the Euganean Hills. There he built himself a small house to protect his privacy. . . . In this place, perfectly convenient and suited to his studies, he spent the rest of his long life, composing a large number of works.¹²³

¹²⁰ Manetti, *DIL*, 22: “Per hunc itaque modum publicis simul atque privatis occupationibus carens otio non desidioso illo et ignobili se litterato et generoso fruebatur. Proinde partim legendo, partim vetustos codices transcribendo, partim amicorum negotiis impartiendo, quod reliquum erat temporis in cumulandis et congregandis undique voluminibus consumebatur” (translation modified).

¹²¹ Manetti, *VP*, 9–10.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 21: “complures ibi annos quietissime habitavit atque studia sua ita peregit ut multa memoriae mandaret.”

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 13: “. . . demum vitam solitariam, utpote huiusmodi humanarum ac divinarum rerum studiis accommodatorem, adamavit. Proinde, ceteris omnibus mundi pompis et honoribus posthabitis, in Euganeis collibus . . . se in otium contulit; ubi et domum parvam, solitudinis gratia, instruxit. . . . In hoc tam opportuno atque tam accommodato loco in studiis suis usque ad extremum vitae longius versatus, multa memoriae mandavit.”

The Florentine humanist Roberto de' Rossi made a similar life decision:

[He] set aside public offices, wife and children – in short, the secular world with all its pomps – and attained great and admirable knowledge of various literatures, Greek as well as Latin, including poetry and oratory, history, mathematics, natural and moral philosophy, and finally metaphysics. Eventually, he excelled so much in the aforesaid fields of study that he came to be regarded as a great orator and a leading philosopher of the time.

Unlike Petrarch, however, Rossi enjoyed the company of other people and even won for himself “a troop of disciples, the sons of distinguished and noble families.”¹²⁴ The description of Rossi illustrates Garin's view of how the contemplative life can intersect with the active, but Manetti's portrayal of Petrarch does not. As far as Manetti is concerned, Petrarch eschews the *vita activa* entirely in his eremitic pursuit of solitude. As a consequence he achieves holiness, even saintliness.¹²⁵

The sleight of hand Manetti employed to incorporate scholasticism into the *studia humanitatis* appears clumsy in comparison to the masterful operation involved in his saintly makeover of Petrarch. Here he reaps the greatest advantage from his “mosaic technique,” juxtaposing anecdotes involving prodigies, portents, and a saintly way of life with the details of Petrarch's birth, education, and literary production. He thereby obscures Petrarch's reputation as an unserious, lascivious love poet and replaces it with one for ascetic self-abnegation, control of the passions, concern for the soul, and holy meditation.

His soul was no less beautiful than his body. Even...when he seems in his lyrics to have indulged amorous passions..., he actually never departed more than a finger's breadth, so to speak, from the most austere gravity... From adolescence to almost the last year of his life, for instance, he maintained a fixed regime of fasting. In addition to fasting on Fridays he also drank only water, as though seasoning his fasts with bitter salt. He used to rise faithfully in the middle of the night to sing the praises of Christ, a habit he always observed with great care, except in case of illness.

¹²⁴ Manetti, *CJEG*, 26: “Robertus Russus...ceteris omnibus cum civitatis magistratibus tum uxor<e> et liberis tum denique saeculo et pompis suis posthabitis, assiduam quandam et admirabilem diversarum litterarum, et poeticae et oratoriae, historiarum et mathematicorum et philosophiae naturalis ac moralis ac demum metaphysicae graecae ac latinae linguae cognitionem navavit. Quocirca in omnibus praedictorum studiorum generibus usque adeo profecisse creditur ut magnus orator ingensque illius temporis philosophus haberetur atque ob hanc singularem et praecipuam doctrinae et eruditionis suae excellentiam factum est ut eius domus magna quadam genosorum et nobilium discipulorum caterva quotidie frequentaretur.”

¹²⁵ Manetti's pious makeover of Petrarch has also been observed by Baldassarri, “Clichés and Myth-Making,” p. 25, who identifies the sources for Manetti's sketch.

In short, he was so far from indulging amorous passions that, owing to his almost religious self-control and his severe, holy habits of life, not a few people claimed that he observed perpetual chastity and virginity. Such claims will not surprise us if we bear in mind his plain and meager diet, his habits of drinking water and eating just uncooked vegetables and fruit, his regular and unremitting fasts – all of which, far from harming him, brought him intense pleasure.¹²⁶

What is more, “he formed close relationships with the most holy and learned men of his time, and he often asked them in his letters to remember him unceasingly in their prayers.”¹²⁷ In the twilight of his existence “he dwelt sweetly in uninterrupted contemplation of the holy mysteries and in long meditation on eternal life.”¹²⁸ Even his great learning and fame take on a holy aspect. Manetti relates that “antiquity would have marveled . . . , recording it *as a miracle*,” how “noble and clever men came not only from other parts of Italy, but also from Transalpine Gaul for the sole purpose of seeing him.”¹²⁹ As if this were not enough, Manetti goes on to describe how Petrarch was sought out and venerated in the manner of a live saint:

A blind grammar school teacher finally succeeded in meeting him after having searched for him all over Italy . . . He was so overcome with the desire to meet him that he had his son and his pupil, who were carrying him, lift him up in their arms so that he might cover the poet's head and right hand

¹²⁶ Manetti, *VP*, 16–17: “Nec minor animi sui decor quam corporis fuit . . . et quamquam . . . in odii suis . . . lascivis amoribus indulsisse videretur, a gravitate tamen censoria ungue latius, ut dicitur, non recedebat . . . Siquidem ieiunium a pueritia animose coeptum usque ad extremum fere vitae suae annum accuratissime simul atque constantissime sine intermissione retinuit; idque ieiunium ita accurate custoditum, inedia sextae feriae, cum solo aquae potu, quasi acriori sale, condiebat. Media insuper nocte ad dicendum Christo laudes igitur surgebat, qui mos ab eo magna cum cura servabatur nisi forte aliqui morbi nonnumquam interrupissent.

Quid plura? Tantum abest ut ipse lascivis amoribus inhaereret ut ob religiosas quandam vitae continentiam atque severitatem et sanctimoniam morum non defuerint qui ipsum perpetuam castitatem ac virginitatem continuisse traderent; quod forte mirari desinemus, si abstinentiam et asperitatem victus, si aquae haustum, si crudas herbas, si pomorum esum, si praeterea quotidianum et perpetuum ieiunium, quibus non modo non offendebar sed vehementius oblectabatur.”

¹²⁷ Ibid., 20: “et cum religiosissimis simul atque doctissimis eius temporis viris magnam per epistulas familiaritatem contraxerat, ita ut eos crebro per litteras precaretur ut sui in divinis eorum orationibus . . . sine intermissione meminissent.”

¹²⁸ Ibid., 23: “in continua quadam altissimarum rerum contemplatione simul atque diuturna aeternae vitae praemeditatione . . . suavissime commorabatur.”

¹²⁹ Ibid., 11: “. . . quod ita mirabile est ut quiddam huic nostro simile mirata antiquitatis pro miraculo litteris mandaverit. Etenim . . . non modo de Italia sed de ulteriori etiam Gallia nobiles quosdam et ingeniosos viros, sola visendi gratia . . . ad se ipsum venisse testatur” (emphasis mine, translation modified).

with kisses, as though, being unable to see him, only actual physical contact with him would satisfy his extraordinary and almost insatiable desire.¹³⁰

Even Petrarch's death was apparently accompanied by a prodigy:

When Petrarca breathed his last sigh he exhaled something like a surpassingly white cloud that, like burning frankincense, went up to the roofbeams and stayed there for a short while before vanishing little by little into the limpid air. This extraordinary event . . . is considered a miracle, clearly confirming that the divine spirit of the poet returned to God.¹³¹

As inventive as these stories may seem, all of them derive from fourteenth-century accounts and thus are nothing new (some even come directly from Petrarch's own letters!).¹³² They had, however, been jettisoned by later biographers, including Bruni, and Manetti's decision to reincorporate them into Petrarch's persona amounts therefore to an insistence on the validity of the older view.¹³³ What is more, Manetti's concern for reporting prodigies and miracles and holy ways of life extends beyond the biography of Petrarch. It is found throughout the *Vita Dantis*¹³⁴ as well, and it also crops up in a rather unexpected place: the biography of the notoriously "abusive" Niccolò Niccoli in *De illustribus longaevis*.¹³⁵ Indeed, in his person not only does the preference for the *vita contemplativa* result in holiness, but with his passionate and single-minded pursuit of the *studia humanitatis* he follows "the true path to a good and happy life."¹³⁶ Behold the apotheosis of humanism.

As a youth Niccoli was forced by his father to study business but felt that he "was born for higher and nobler goals." Once out from under his father's

¹³⁰ Ibid., 11: "caecum namque grammaticum per totam ferme Italiam ipsum quaeritasse ac tandem aliquando convenisse tradit; atque prae nimio conveniendi sui desiderio ipsum sublatum manibus filii et discipuli, quibus ambobus pro vehiculo utebatur, caput eius et dexteram manum crebris osculationibus petisse describit, quasi tactu ipso eximio et paene insatiabili sui desiderio satisfaceret, quandoquidem visu satiari non posset."

¹³¹ Ibid., 23: "Ipsam scilicet moribundum in extrema ultimi spiritus sui efflatione aerem quandam tenuissimum in candidissimae nubeculae speciem exhalasse, qui instar incensi thuris usque ad laquearia tabulati altius elatus ibidem vel paululum requievit; postremo in aerem limpidissimum paulatim resolutum evanuisse. Hoc adeo mirabile . . . pro miraculo habitum, divinum poetae spiritum ad Deum revertisse propalam indicavit."

¹³² See Baldassarri, "Clichés and Myth-Making," p. 25.

¹³³ For the biographies of Petrarch, see Angelo Solerti, *Le vite di Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio, scritte fino al secolo decimosesto* (Milan, 1904–1905).

¹³⁴ See Manetti, *VD*, 10, where a dream foretells Dante's birth and portends his destiny as a poet; and *VD*, 53, where Dante appears after his death in his son's dream to tell him where to find a hidden manuscript of *Paradiso*.

¹³⁵ Niccoli was called "abusive" by Bruni, who entitled his invective against Niccoli *Oratio in nebulationem maledicam*; Piccolomini calls him "maledicus" in Piccolomini, *DVI*, p. 35.15.

¹³⁶ Manetti, *DIL*, 19: "veram bene beateque vivendi viam."

thumb, “he put aside all business matters as *trivial* and *useless* and turned to the study of the Latin language.”¹³⁷ The pattern is familiar: the “higher and nobler goals” of “the study of the Latin language” are contrasted with the “trivial and useless” study of business. And now we see why:

He disregarded all the other arts, although they might appear to be more useful and profitable, in favor of studying Latin literature. He had a unique love for humanistic studies (*peritia humanitatis*), from which all virtues derive, and decided to follow his passion. It is obvious that the principal aim of the *studia humanitatis* has to do with virtue, for in them, much more than in other disciplines, the object is moral rectitude – an object that is always found when truly sought. And it is from moral rectitude that justice, fortitude, modesty and all the other virtues spring forth and derive.¹³⁸

Throughout his biographies, Manetti has broadened the content and meaning of the *studia humanitatis* to include philosophy, theology, mathematics, music – in short, to include all of the *artes liberales*. Now, however, he offers a version of the *studia humanitatis* that accords perfectly with that of Piccolomini, Biondo, and Facio. For Niccoli is said to have “turned to the study of the Latin language,” and to have “disregarded *all the other arts* . . . in favor of *studying Latin literature*.” Furthermore, Manetti adds an element to the mix that was surprisingly missing from our first three authors: the equation of humanist education and virtue.

That the study of Latin could be related to virtue in any way is bound to baffle most modern readers. Yet the claim that the acquisition of eloquent Latin and the study of the Roman classics instilled in the student the virtue necessary for proper personal development, social maturity, political action – in short, for *humanitas* – is a familiar one from the letters in which Guarino describes his own school, as well as from the humanist educational treatises written by Pier Paolo Vergerio, Leonardo Bruni, Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, Battista Guarino, and Maffeo Vegio.¹³⁹ For about thirty years now there has been great debate over these texts: Are the humanists’ claims

¹³⁷ Ibid., 17: “quasi ad altiora et digniora nasceretur”; “omnibus mercaturis velut frivolis et inanibus rebus praetermissis, ad latinae linguae cognitionem se contulisse dicitur” (emphasis mine).

¹³⁸ Ibid., 18: “post latinarum litterarum eruditionem ceterarum artium studia neglexit quamquam utiliora ac vendibilia viderentur; humanitatis vero peritiam, unde virtutes eruuntur, unice adamavit adamatamque sibi delegit et voluit. Haec enim humanitatis studia ad virtutem apprime spectare et pertinere manifestum est. Nam in his ipsis prae aliis artium studiis honestum quaeritur quaesitumque haud dubie reperitur. Ex honesto autem iustitia, fortitudo, modestia ceteraque virtutes emanare et effluere videntur” (translation altered).

¹³⁹ For the texts in question and discussions of them, see *Humanist Educational Treatises*; McManamon, *Pierpaolo Vergerio the Elder*, pp. 89–103 (on Vergerio’s *De ingenuis moribus*); *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, pp. 235–254 (on Bruni); Grafton and Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities*, pp. 1–28 (on Guarino); Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, pp. 110–141, 407–410; Garin,

about virtue true? What actually went on in the humanist classroom? What was its intention, its effect on students, its usefulness to individuals, society, and the political regime?¹⁴⁰ Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine challenged the traditional view of Eugenio Garin, subsequently restated by Paul Grendler, which essentially takes the educational ideal elaborated by the humanists as a statement of fact.¹⁴¹ Treating Guarino's letters and other descriptions by his students as advertising material rather than pure confessions of the heart, Grafton and Jardine argue instead that such accounts cannot be taken as an indication of what happened in the classroom, nor as a reliable guide to how virtue was transmitted there, if at all. In their analysis, when the humanist classroom did initiate students "into the whole of ancient culture and the concomitant elevated attitudes and beliefs," such did not follow from the content or the method of the curriculum. Rather it took place "as a lived emulation of a teacher who projects the cultural ideal above and beyond the drilling he provides in curriculum subjects." Thus humanist education worked, when it worked as advertised, not because of a specific content or method but because of "a charismatic teacher."¹⁴²

It is fascinating to see that the controversial conclusion deduced by Grafton and Jardine is enunciated and expounded by Manetti:

Niccolò thus became a friend and a disciple of a certain Luigi Marsili – an exceptional man of that time for his piety, holiness, and the excellence of his learning – so as to learn the true path to a good and happy life while studying the *bonae artes* . . . Having given himself over to learning from this unique and erudite man, he studied with such care and diligence under his guidance that he never left his side. Thus it happened that, in addition to a deep understanding of many different subjects, he also acquired from him an excellent moral character and a fine pattern of life . . . For it commonly happens that we imitate the behavior of those with whom we consort and become a kind of copy of the person imitated, and this happens more easily and more often when we respect and admire such persons.¹⁴³

Ritratti di umanisti, pp. 69–106 (on Guarino); Garin, *L'educazione in Europa*; Garin, *L'umanesimo italiano*, pp. 90–93; *L'educazione umanistica in Italia*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Bari, 1949).

¹⁴⁰ For the history of scholarship on humanist education and a resume of this debate, see Black, *Humanism and Education*, pp. 12–33.

¹⁴¹ See note 139 above. ¹⁴² Grafton and Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities*, p. 27.

¹⁴³ Manetti, *DIL*, 19–20: "Quocirca in familiaritatem et disciplinam cuiusdam Lodovici Marsilii sese recepit, viri per ea tempora et religione et sanctimonia vitae et excellentia doctrinae praestantissimi, ut una cum bonarum artium studiis veram bene beateque vivendi viam exinde perciperet. . . In huius ergo singularissimi atque eruditissimi viri disciplina deditus, ita in huiusmodi ludo diligenter accurateque perseveravit ut ab eius fere latere numquam recederet. Ex quo factum est ut praeter singularem quandam plurimarum rerum cognitionem, egregios quoque mores et optima instituta vitae ab eo reportaret. . . Fit enim plerumque ut mores eorum imitemur imitativae similitudinem quandam exprimamus cum quibus diutius conversamur; atque id ipsum facilius ac frequentius

Thus virtue did not actually flow directly from the *studia humanitatis*. Instead the study of Latin acted as a conduit by which the moral rectitude of the teacher passed to the student. Its effect on Niccoli was nothing short of marvelous:

Our Niccolò was so taken with Luigi's learning . . . that he put aside all the desires most people naturally have for riches, honors and children and devoted himself entirely to the study of the *bonae artes*. From that time on he never longed to amass wealth like the greedy, nor sought honors like the ambitious, nor indulged in matrimony in order to raise a family. Instead, he remained poor, unknown and celibate, entirely free of all worldly cares, living happily with his books in the greatest quiet and tranquility.¹⁴⁴

Niccoli is the picture of a humanist monk. According to Kristeller, the secularization of the monastic ideal is "characteristic of Renaissance humanism" and "even more significant than [its] outright defense or rejection." But what we see in Manetti is more than what Kristeller described as a simple "transfer of the ideal of the solitary life from the monk and hermit to the lay scholar."¹⁴⁵ According to this passage, the pursuit of humanism entailed a life of poverty, humility, and celibacy – the very Christian virtues lived out by monks. Here Manetti offers a new lay version not only of the monastic ideal of solitude but also of the monastic life proper: an escape from the business of the unclean secular world not by way of prayer or meditation on sacred texts, but by way of the study of secular Latin literature. If Petrarch led a holy life *in addition to* being a humanist, Niccoli led a holy life *because* he was a humanist.

Curiously, the actual facts of Niccoli's life in no way accord with Manetti's presentation.¹⁴⁶ For example, he lived on a mass of inherited and borrowed wealth and was sustained by the friendship, patronage, and unflagging support of Cosimo de' Medici, yet he complained bitterly of this dependence. He was a notoriously "abusive" (*maledicus*) critic feared for his ferocious

contingit si cum aliqua observatione et admiratione intuemur" (translation altered). For the Augustinian monk Luigi Marsili, see Paolo Falzoni, "Marsili, Luigi," in *DBI*, vol. LXX (2008), pp. 767–773; and Arbesmann, *Der Augustinereremitenorden*, pp. 73–119.

¹⁴⁴ Manetti, *DIL*, 21: "Ita huius doctrina, ita mores, ita instituta mirabili quoddam dicendi lepore condita Nicolao nostro placuerunt ut ceteris vel divitiarum vel honorum vel suscipiendorum liberorum, quae maxime ab hominibus suapte natura expetantur, cupiditatibus posthabitis totum se in otium ad bonarum artium studia converteret. Neque postea ullo umquam tempore aut comparandis opibus, ut cupidi, inhiavit, aut aucupandis honoribus, ut ambitiosi, inservivit, aut rei uxoriae, procreandi prolis gratia, indulsit, sed potius egenus et inglorius et caelebs, omni saeculari cura liber et vacuus, in summa quiete et tranquillitate una cum libris suis feliciter vivebat."

¹⁴⁵ Kristeller, "The Active and the Contemplative Life," pp. 139–141 (quotations on 139); cf. also Lombardo, "Vita Activa," p. 86.

¹⁴⁶ For Niccoli, see Davies, "An Emperor without Clothes."

and cruel censure of others. At times he acted like a sociopath, throughout the course of his life alienating the affection of nearly all his friends, Bruni and Poggio included; only the monk Traversari never broke with him. He quarreled constantly with his brothers. He could not stand the fame of others and thus chased away the eminent humanists, like Guarino and Filelfo, who were invited to teach Greek at the University of Florence. And finally, he was infamous throughout Italy for having an illicit affair with his housekeeper, Benvenuta, whom he was reputed to keep at home as a concubine.

Clearly, poverty, humility, and celibacy were components of neither the life nor the reputation of Niccolò Niccoli. Nevertheless, Manetti's text need not be read in a sardonic spirit or merely as a product of rhetorical *ornatio*. Much of what he reports in the biographies is, as we have seen, legendary, and some of it intentionally so. Manetti does not intend to take a photograph of humanism but rather to paint an idealized portrait of it. Like his extension of the *studia humanitatis* to Dante's scholastic education in Paris, or his attribution to Boccaccio of the flourishing of Greek studies, his beatification of Niccoli serves the purpose of filling in the details of that ideal. Niccoli had died only two years earlier, and his memory was fair game. Manetti clearly sought to rehabilitate Niccoli's reputation. Poggio had already begun this process in his funeral oration for Niccoli, and much of Manetti's biography is drawn from that source.¹⁴⁷ More was at stake here, however. As usual with his mosaic technique, there is a specific design behind Manetti's choice of passages to cut from other works and paste into his own. With what must have been a profound sense of irony, Manetti transformed Niccoli into the scion of a noble line of humanists beginning with the very three poets that he, Niccoli, had so famously despised: Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. Beyond devoting themselves to the *studia humanitatis*, all these men lived holy lives of divine study, moral purity, and even humanistic beatification.

Would it be proper to call Manetti's portrayals of Petrarch and Niccoli the hagiography of humanism? Indeed, the texts bear more than a passing resemblance to the practices of the Christian tradition of hagiography, viz. the glorification of the subject's holiness and the citing of miracles

¹⁴⁷ The similarities were noted by Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, pp. 322–323 (as cited in Manetti, *Biographical Writings*, p. 305, n. 6). Baron, however, interprets both Manetti's and Poggio's *ritratti* as following in the tradition of Cino Rinuccini's *Invettiva*, and thus as critical of Niccoli. For Poggio's *Oratio in funere Nicolai Nicoli civis florentini*, see the text in Poggio Bracciolini, *Opera omnia*, ed. Riccardo Fubini, 4 vols. (Turin, 1964), vol. I, pp. 270–277; and the discussion in Walser, *Poggius Florentinus*, pp. 203–204.

and divine signs as proof, the purpose being to provide holy examples for the reader and ultimately to save his soul. It is rather unlikely that Manetti intends to lead anyone to eternal salvation through the inspirational retelling of a holy life accredited by God Himself, but his readers nonetheless would have recognized the narrative elements of hagiography that pervade his writings. Manetti is consciously co-opting a popular genre and using it to portray humanism in a particular way. He intends to show that the *studia humanitatis* is *a*, if not *the*, proper pursuit for a modern Christian. Dante and Petrarch studied theology in Paris, the center of Christian learning. What is more, their lives were surrounded and confirmed by divine signs and miracles. Petrarch lived the life of an ascetic hermit in addition to resurrecting good Latin. And now, Niccoli, whose engagement with secular Latin literature amounts to a regime of spiritual exercises, approximates the ideal of Christian monasticism – but *in* the world. Here we see the glorification of holiness that is one of the essential aspects of hagiography. And we might also glimpse the second: a soteriological purpose. For the genre of biography, as a species of demonstrative rhetoric, uses praise of the subject to persuade the reader to imitate that subject (as described by Facio in his *De viris illustribus*). Thus in writing these biographies, Manetti not only describes his subjects as good Christians who devoted themselves to the *studia humanitatis*, he encourages the reader to follow in their footsteps. With little hyperbole and only a slight escape into metaphor, we can justifiably call this the hagiography of humanism.¹⁴⁸

Manetti's collective biographies convey a conception of humanism that is related to but nonetheless distinct from the one found in Piccolomini, Biondo, and Facio. As in their writings, here, too, humanism entails the resuscitation of Ciceronian Latin, the search for classical literature, the collection and copying of manuscripts, the study of Greek, and the general love of antiquity (although all of these receive a different shading). Yet Manetti's humanism also includes the revival of poetry, both in Latin and in the vernacular. Furthermore, its contours, instead of being rigidly fixed at points of contact with other learned contexts, are much softer. They even blend into the confines of scholastic philosophy and theology and seem closed off only to law (and perhaps medicine). Moreover, a new spiritual, sacred side to learning pervades Manetti's conception. In the end, despite

¹⁴⁸ But still, of course, to be distinguished from actual Christian hagiography written by humanists, on which see Alison Knowles Frazier, *Possible Lives: Authors and Saints in Renaissance Italy* (New York, 2005).

the name *studia humanitatis*, humanism comes to signify all liberal, i.e., non-professional, branches of knowledge, and to embrace things divine as well as human. The recurring phrase “things human and divine” signifies a range of meanings, from the standard scholastic disciplines to the private reading of sacred and secular texts. It comes close to standing for “universal knowledge.” This knowledge is best achieved in the pursuit of the contemplative life, a new possibility for lay existence offered by the *studia humanitatis*, excellence in which elevates the mere scholar to saintliness. Even if outright sainthood should remain out of reach, the pursuit of the *studia humanitatis* – understood not as a set of propositions, disciplines, or curricular contents but as a way of life – is nevertheless the sure path to virtue.